

Naked Bible Podcast Transcript

Episode 183

Hebrews 4:13-5:10

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Hebrews 4:14-5:10 focuses on the fact that our high priest—the person who runs interference between us and God when it comes to eternal life—is the same person who gave his life for that purpose: Jesus. It is inconceivable in the writer’s mind that anyone who believes in Christ would be turned away from eternal life because Jesus, our high priest, understands the weakness of humanity and the power of external temptation. After all, he became a human precisely to provide salvation, knowing that it would mean experiencing human weakness and temptation. Human weakness and failure are therefore not going to change Christ’s disposition toward those who believe in him.

Transcript

TS: Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 183: Hebrews 4:14-5:10. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey, Mike, you know what this week is: it's our matchup, head-to-head, Fantasy Football time!

MH: Yep, yep, you have my condolences ahead of time.

TS: Yeah? Well, we shall see. So whoever comes out on top of this is going to be top dog.

MH: Yeah, funny you should say it that way, because the Pugnacious Pugs plan to be at the top of the heap.

TS: “Top dog,” that’s right, yeah, I shouldn’t have said that. I’m going to go ahead and edit that out.

[laughter]

MH: Yeah, you do that.

TS: I'm going to, it's done, deleted. Actually, it's a little sneak-peak to maybe the Superbowl this year... of us, me and you.

MH: Well, that could be. Hopefully, you'll make it that far. I plan to be there.

TS: I'm going to be there. I'm not Tim, [laughter] who's struggling this year... Tim—shout out.

MH: Boy, yeah, that's a shout out all right.

TS: He's *not* top dog; he's the opposite of... top. I guess that would be the underdog.

MH: There you go. I guess he could run the table and make the playoffs, but who knows.

TS: Also Mike, this week is Halloween. I'm just curious what you're going to dress up as.

MH: I'm going to go as what I go as every year. I'm going to go as an adult—an adult male.

[laughter]

TS: An adult... pug... male. Yes. You all going to go trick-or-treating? You all going to do anything up there in Canada?

MH: I don't know what they do in Canada, but my kids are too old, even though they'll still want me to go out and buy candy or something.

TS: You could probably go as a Canadian.

[laughter]

MH: Oh, boy! And yes, there would be ways to do that.

[laughter]

TS: I don't know how we transition from Fantasy Football, Halloween, and Canadians, into Hebrews 4-5, but I'm going to leave that up to you.

MH: Well, I don't have any good suggestions, so we might as well just jump in to it. [laughter]

Alright, so, yeah, we're picking up with Hebrews 4. The last time, we went through verse 13. This time, it's going to be verses 14, 15, and 16, then on into

chapter 5—the first ten verses. This section marks the beginning of the theme of Christ’s high priesthood. As I said last time, this is a theme that actually continues on into chapter 10. This is sort of like “Christ as High Priest, Part One.” I don’t know how many parts it’s going to be, but it’s going to go back and forth all the way through chapter 10. So we’re just going to jump in here and say what we can say, based upon this little section. When we get into chapter 6, it’s going to be more of the whole question about status of faith. Hebrews 6 is fodder for people who wonder about, “Could I lose my salvation?” So we’re going to back into that theme. But for today—for right now—this is where we’re at, because this is what the author does. So let’s just start with verse 14, and I’ll read the last three verses of chapter 4 just to pick those up, and then we’ll focus in on verse 14. We read:

¹⁴ Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. ¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶ Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

So that’s the last three verses of chapter 4. If we look at verse 14, the first of those verses, we have:

¹⁴ Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God,

5:00

That line—“hold fast our confession”—should take our minds back to Hebrews 3:6, a couple episodes ago: “hold fast our confidence”. Again, the writer is reiterating the concern that believers—his readers (some of them at least)—might be falling away or losing faith. Why is this consistent? Why does this take our mind back? Well, in Hebrews 3:6, the word was “confidence”—“hold fast our confidence.” Here it’s “hold fast our confession.” It’s really two ways of saying the same thing, that our confidence—our confession—is that we have the promise of eternal life in God’s family, his house, his household. Back in Hebrews 3:6, that’s mentioned again. We get two reasons here in this verse as to why we shouldn’t doubt (why we shouldn’t fall into unbelief is a better way to say that). Because doubt (having questions) isn’t the same as falling into unbelief. So the real concern here is forsaking faith—turning around and not believing, really releasing or surrendering this confession or this confidence. So we get two reasons why we shouldn’t do that here in verse 14. There’s a lot packed in this verse. The first one is that Jesus, God’s own son, is the basis of the promise, and therefore our confidence. Go back to verse 14:

¹⁴ Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens...

Who is that? Jesus, the son of God! So since all that's all true and we have Jesus, the son of God, as our great high priest:

...let us hold fast our confession.

So God's own son is the basis of the thing we're being asked to believe. He's the basis of the promise; therefore, he should be the basis of our confidence. In other words, our confidence shouldn't be based—rooted in—ourselves, our abilities, our behavior, our success, our failure—that isn't the basis for it. That's not what "runs interference" for us before God. The point is that God's own son is the point person for who qualifies for membership in God's family. We are his siblings (Hebrews 2) by virtue of the incarnation and our faith in his work—our belief that he fulfilled God's plan and was an acceptable offering for our sins. How could he not be? We think back to Hebrews 2, which is where Jesus says:

**"I will tell of your name to my brothers;
in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise."**

¹³ And again,

"I will put my trust in him."

And again,

"Behold, I and the children God has given me."

This is all a meeting in "the congregation." But if we continue on in Hebrews 2, he follows that with:

"Behold, I and the children God has given me."

¹⁴ Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil,¹⁵ and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. ¹⁶ For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham. 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.

Now, you think about that, that's Hebrews 2:12-17, and how it ties in to Hebrews 4:14, where we started our episode today,

¹⁴ Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God...

... let's not fall into unbelief. Think about Hebrews 2 and what that says. The very reason Christ became a man:

¹⁴ Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil,¹⁵ and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.

The very reason that we even have the incarnation is so that he could take care of this problem. And the very fact that he became a man—verse 17:

¹⁷ Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest...

It even uses the same language. The incarnation happened so that Jesus could serve in this role—to be the faithful high priest. In other words, he is the go-between between us and God, the one who runs interference between us and God. The incarnation happened so that he could be a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God and also, as Hebrews 2:17 ends, “to make propitiation for the sins of the people.”

10:00

Now, since he did that, you go back to Hebrews 4. Since all that is factual, why would we have any trouble holding fast our confession? In other words, why would we have any doubt that our belief in the person who did this is going to result in eternal life? Because it's this person who is our brother. That person—Jesus—became a man just so that we could have confidence in him to make us part of God's family. That's really the point here. This is going to open...he's already dealt in Hebrews 2 with making propitiation and becoming incarnate. But even there, he drops this high priest line, and he's going to pick it up right here in Hebrews 4:14 and then going on into chapter 5 and the other chapters. If this is the role Jesus plays, he's not going to condemn us for weakness. Why? Hebrews 4:15:

¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶ Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

By the way, the throne of grace is where Jesus sits. How do we know that? Because he ascended. We've already seen that in Hebrews 1. He ascended to

the throne. He is seated at the right hand of God, next to the Father. So when we go to the throne and ask for grace, who's there? It's him, and we're the reason he did what he did. So the writer is saying, "Look, you've got to think about all this, people. We're not going to be condemned for our weakness. We have a high priest, an intercessor, that understands our weakness, because he became a man and he understands the trials and the temptations. He understands all that. He is himself the solution to that weakness. He's the solution to our imperfection, our sin, our inability to please God. What he did in our place is he both understands our problem—our inability—and he also becomes the solution for it."

This ascension to the throne is actually the reference point to this line in Hebrews 4:14 that we have a high priest who has "passed through the heavens." This is a reference to the ascension—something that would not have been allowed. God wouldn't have allowed Christ to ascend to the throne had he not accomplished the task that God gave him. But he did! And so God did, and the fact that God finds the work of Jesus fulfilled, completed, and acceptable, should give us confidence so that we "hold fast our confession." In other words, so that we hold fast to our belief. We have every reason to believe. Luke Timothy Johnson I think has a nice little section here on this "passing through the heavens"... I want to make sure to include this in the podcast. I'm going to read from his commentary on Hebrews. Luke Timothy Johnson writes,

The description of Jesus as high priest is here meshed with the imagery of enthronement, which we saw earlier in 1:3, 13, and 2:9–10. Jesus is a priest who has "passed through" the heavens. This is the only time Hebrews uses the verb *dierchomai*, and it gives the reader the sense of a spatial journey that penetrates through heavenly realms into God's presence. Later, Hebrews will use a similar spatial image, when it pictures Jesus as priest "entering into the heavenly sanctuary" (6:19–20; 8:1–2; 9:11, 24; 10:20)...

It is, rather, the full and ontological entry of the human Jesus, through his resurrection from the dead and his exaltation to the right hand, into the power and glory that are proper to God. It was of the Son that [Hebrews] declared, "[he] took a seat at the right hand of the majesty on high" (1:3), and to this Son that the Scripture was addressed, "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever" (Ps 44:7; Heb 1:8). Likewise in 8:1, Hebrews will report that "he has taken a seat at the right hand of the majesty in the heavens," and in 12:2, "he has taken a seat at the right hand of the throne of God"...

Jesus, therefore, is enthroned as Lord, and because of this, the readers also can approach the presence of God's throne "with boldness."

15:00

How else would you approach the person—seated—who did all this on your behalf? It was the very purpose for why he did this. And God was pleased with

his performance—Jesus’ performance. He accomplished everything he was supposed to accomplish on our behalf. And he is our brother. He is not ashamed to call us brethren (Hebrews 2). The writer is saying, why would you not maintain your belief? Why would you not maintain your confidence? There’s nothing that needs to be done that hasn’t been done already and done perfectly. Because salvation—your confession, your membership in the household of God, to use Hebrews 3:6 terminology—that all depends on the performance of *one*. That would be Christ. It does not depend on your performance. So here we are back to this theme, tying it in to this high priest idea. Now I’ll read verses 15-16 again:

¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶ Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Now Johnson, I’m going to quote him a little bit here. He writes about the word “sympathize.” We have a high priest who is able to sympathize. He says:

...that word in English has been watered down to a sort of vague emotional distress, whereas its use in passages like 4 Macc 13:23 suggests a stronger “common feeling” among those who are suffering. At the very least, the term as used by Hebrews should not bear the slight air of condescension carried by the English “sympathize,” for it is precisely this composition’s point that Christ entered fully into the human experience of suffering. The term “weaknesses” (*astheneiai*) encompasses every form of physical debility such as those caused by illness (Gal 4:13; 1 Tim 5:23; Luke 8:2; Jas 5:14), as well as any lack of capacity (see 1 Cor 15:43; Rom 8:26; 2 Cor 11:30), including moral judgment or behavior (Rom 6:19; 1 Cor 8:7–10).

Basically, Johnson’s saying that weaknesses here are all-encompassing. It’s a term that’s used to describe weaknesses of all kinds that are characteristic of humanity. Back to Johnson. He has one other section here. He says:

Christ’s identification with human weakness and even failure does not, however, extend to a participation in human sin: the phrase *chōris hamartias* [without sin] is emphatic. That the human Jesus was free from sin is the consistent teaching of the New Testament (see 2 Cor 5:21; John 7:18; 8:46; 1 John 3:5–7; 1 Pet 1:19; 2:22; 3:18)...

I’m going to look up a few of his cross-references here so we can get the context. These are familiar passages.

²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. 2 Corinthians 5:21

¹⁸ The one who speaks on his own authority seeks his own glory; but the one who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true, and in him there is no falsehood. John 7:18

¹⁹ [We are bought] with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. 1 Peter 1:19

²² He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. 1 Peter 2:22

That the human Jesus was free from sin is the consistent teaching of the New Testament, so this affirmation by the author of Hebrews is not, in itself, surprising. But since the work of Christ in this composition is so much connected to his making “purification for sins” of others (1:3; 2:17; 5:1, 3; 7:27; 8:12; 9:26, 28; 10:2, 3, 4, 11, 12, 17, 18, 26; 13:11), and since his capacity to do this for others rests, as the following section will insist, on his being made perfect through the things that he suffered (5:9), it is worth asking what Hebrews understands by “sin” (*hamartia*). It cannot mean simply human weaknesses and temptations, for the author has already identified Christ completely with those human experiences (4:15).

20:00

In other words, Jesus was not without human weakness and temptation. He experienced all of those things—and a broad range of those things—but he was without sin. Neither human weakness nor temptation is therefore, in and of themselves, sin. Those things are not sin. This is not by definition sin. Being tempted is not, by definition, committing sin. Weakness and temptation work together to entice us to commit sin, but they are not themselves sin. These are different things. The all-encompassing usage in the New Testament of the term for weakness is *asteneia* (ἀσθένεια). What that means is that Jesus experienced the broad range of what humans experience in terms of weakness and in terms of some sort of solicitation or enticement to do wrong. Jesus experienced all of that stuff, but he never *did* wrong. Now, what are we talking about, specifically, here? Jesus would have experienced the urges of the flesh, because he was human. He would have experience those urges and the weaknesses of the flesh that make humans vulnerable to sin, but he never himself actually crossed that line—never actually sinned. In other words, he always reacted and responded to such things—such urges—according to God’s will. This is why Hebrews 5:8 and a little bit later (getting a little bit ahead of ourselves here in the passage) can say that Jesus learned obedience through what he experienced. If we look at Hebrews 5:8:

⁸ Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. ⁹ And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him...

If we think about those verses and then we go to Hebrews 10:9-10, we see a conversation between Christ and God.

⁹ then he added, “Behold, I have come to do your will.” He does away with the first in order to establish the second. ¹⁰ And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

So you take a look at these sets of comments in Hebrews 5:8-9 about how Jesus learned obedience through suffering. It was that obedience—that experience—that validated him. Being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, and he intended (Hebrews 10:9-10) to do this all along. Jesus knew that when he agreed to become incarnate... That’s what we’re going to see in Hebrews 10 when we get to that point, when we have this conversation between Jesus and the Father. Jesus knew that when this plan was put in place (or at least devised and then decided upon), he knew what it would mean: he would go through weakness, he would go through temptation. He would have to learn what it was to be under duress from weakness and from external temptation. He would have to go through that, and then learn what it meant to obey God. Prior to that point, you don’t have these things as a member of the Trinity—as God, as Yahweh, the whole Trinitarian idea. You don’t have these things. You don’t have weakness, you don’t have temptations. He was willing to do it, and through all that he would learn obedience. That’s the point of that language, which is kind of surprising and kind of interesting, as well. Jesus shared all the weakness and temptations of being human, but he never sinned. Consequently, he was made perfect.

By the way, we should say something about that verb, “was made perfect.” The verb that gets translated “made perfect”—*teleioō* (τελειόω) in the Greek... According to *BDAG*, it has a semantic range; it means several things. But including that is the idea of bringing to completion something, to complete something, to bring something to an end, to finish something. And by virtue of it being done, it’s “made perfect”—it’s complete. So by virtue of Jesus experiencing this, he was declared at the end of all that... Having endured weakness and endured temptation successfully, he was declared to be completely free from sin. And that state of being is final. Jesus’ sinless status is perfect; it can’t be improved upon.

Now you say, “Well, Mike, we get it; why do you bring this up?” Well, I think there’s some relationship to this language and a question that I’ve probably gotten on two or three Q&A’s, and that is, “When we’re glorified in the New Earth,

25:00

is there still a chance that sin might happen, or rebellion might happen?" I think this bears on that question. I've answered that question before by saying, "We were made as closely like Jesus as we could possibly be made. We are like him. We are united to him, we share in his nature, we're glorified, and we're in the perfect environment now, but nevertheless, we aren't little Yahwehs now. We are *like* him.

But I've given that explanation to say that while we can't say we are flawless in nature, we're about as close to that as we can possibly get, because we're united to Christ. Here in Hebrews chapter 4 and going into chapter 5, we learned that Christ's status of sinlessness is complete and perfect, and we are joined to him. In the eschaton (our final glorification), we are fully—as much as we can possibly be—united to him. We are as much like him as we can possibly be (I John 3). In the language of Hebrews, we will be made holy by the offering of the perfect one who was bent on doing the will of God even before the incarnation. So the likelihood of anything going wrong in the New Earth is extraordinarily slim, almost to the point of it being not even a coherent thing to ask. And it's because of Christ's perfection and our union with him. There would have to be some defection in that (and I would daresay I don't know what that would be). There would have to be some defect in that for anything to go wrong in the New Heaven and the New Earth. You have to allow for some little iota—a little quantum particle here—of disconnect because we are not fully God himself, obviously, but we are united to one who is perfect. And that is not only how God looks at us, but (if I can use this kind of language) that influences our behavior on the other side, when we will have this glorified state. So basically, don't look for anything bad to happen on the other side there. Luke Timothy Johnson has a little statement here that I think is worth pointing out at this point. He says:

The triumph of Christ over sin and death is a triumph for each one of us as well, and his sharing in the power of God means that humans have a genuine hope of mercy and favor when they approach God's throne, for we have as our advocate one who is like us in every respect and who knows us from the inside.

I would add that not only do we have an advocate for us who is like us in every respect, but we are as like him in every way possible that we can be, because we are united to him (when we're glorified). So this is the kind of situation the writer of Hebrews wants us to think about so that we can be confident, we can hold fast to our confession (Hebrews 4:14). Think about it this way: rather than be burdened by our own sins, our own flaws, our own defects, our own failures... because we've all been there, and a lot of Christians are stuck there. They evaluate their relationship to God based upon their own performance. I understand that and I know the experience. We've all been there. But rather than be burdened by that—by our own sins and flaws—what the writer of Hebrews wants us to be thinking is, "You should be confident in God's promise of access to eternal life in his family because of certain things." Don't be looking at yourself.

Don't be evaluating your membership in God's family based upon yourself, as though it hinged upon your moral perfection. It doesn't rest on that. Your confidence should be in God's promise of eternal life based on a number of other things. Like what?

1. Jesus knows what it's like to be us. He knows what our weaknesses do to us. He knows what temptations are. He just knows that.
2. Despite knowing ahead of time (this is Hebrews 10:9-10 now) that he would have to experience all that, he said yes. He determined to do that; he determined to do the will of God. He knew what it meant to become like us. For the first time in his existence, he would have to go through these things. So that's why he's sympathetic.
3. Ultimately, our salvation depends on Jesus' performance of the task that God gave him, not on our own merit and not on ourselves in any respect.

30:00

So that's why we should hold fast our confidence. If we're turned away from the family of God, then God would have to turn away his own Son. That just isn't going to happen. So we won't be turned away. Now the author goes through all that talk into chapter 5. Look at what he says. Let's read chapter 5. We'll start at the very beginning here. Hebrews 4:14 was, "since we have a great high priest who's done all this stuff, we should be confident." Then in 5:1 he says (talking about high priests from among men, who were not God's son):

For every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. ² He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness. ³ Because of this he is obligated to offer sacrifice for his own sins just as he does for those of the people.

The writer of Hebrews is describing a normal, human high priest and what that's like, and he's doing this to draw the contrast with the high priesthood of Jesus. The high priests chosen from among men act on behalf of men, they offer gifts and sacrifices, and they even have to offer sacrifice for their own sins. Verse 4:

⁴ And no one takes this honor for himself, but only when called by God, just as Aaron was. ⁵ So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him who said to him,

**"You are my Son,
today I have begotten you";**

⁶ as he says also in another place,

**“You are a priest forever,
after the order of Melchizedek.”**

We’ve been through both of these themes before. If you look up this “begotten” thing in the Old Testament, it is linked to kingship. Here it’s also linked to being a high priest. And kingship and high priestly-ship (if that’s a word, and it isn’t)... kingship and priesthood are fused together in Melchizedek. Melchizedek is the high priest—the king high priest that is cast in the Old Testament as not having beginning or end. In other words, his high priestly status—his kingly status (Jesus’ status)—isn’t based on lineage. It has no beginning and it has no end. If you’re new to the podcasts and you’re wondering what about that means about Melchizedek, we did four or five episodes of Melchizedek you can go back and listen to those. Here, for our sake, the writer of Hebrews is saying that Christ, our high priest, is unlike human high priests because he doesn’t have to sacrifice for himself. But in other respects, he isn’t like the other high priests because he didn’t exalt himself to that position. Just like Aaron had to be appointed, Christ was appointed too. He’s appointed directly by God. Let’s go to Hebrews 5:7.

⁷ In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. ⁸ Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. ⁹ And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, ¹⁰ being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek.

35:00

Again, this is language we’ve covered a lot. In our earlier episode (#175) when we began our study in the book of Hebrews, the first chapter... We looked at this “begotten” language. In Psalm 2:7 and 2 Samuel 7:14, it refers to kingship. It doesn’t refer to when someone begins to exist. If you look at Psalm 2:7 and 2 Samuel 7:14, this statement about “today I have begotten you” is spoken about the Israelite king, namely King David. David existed already. He was the king. It has nothing to do with chronological beginning or point of origin. It refers to something else. Its use here connects kingship (that’s its reference in the Old Testament) to priesthood through Melchizedek, just like I mentioned earlier. We’ve done a number of episodes (166, 167, 168, and 170) on Melchizedek. We’re not going to spend our time here to repeat that material. But our point here is that we don’t have a mere human intercessor. We have something different. We have one who doesn’t need to sacrifice for himself—one who is completely perfected in purity. Who could possibly tell Jesus, the great high priest... Who could possibly tell him, “Hey, your sacrificial intercession isn’t adequate.” Or, “Hey, you’re not allowed to let this particular human being into the family of God. You’re not allowed to give him/her eternal life.” Who’s going to say that to Jesus? This is the point at the end of chapter 4: when we draw near to the throne of

grace, who's sitting there? It's Christ, who was incarnate for us (on our behalf), who is functioning as our intercessor, his work is accomplished, he sits down at the right hand of God—that's the one who's on the throne. When we approach the throne of grace, who in the world is going to turn to Jesus and say, "This person isn't covered?" This whole state of affairs is eternal. It's never-ending because Christ's priesthood has no beginning or end. There is the Mechizedek analogy again.

So the benefit to us is eternal. Think about it: if the priesthood of Christ is eternal, then the benefit of it—what it accomplishes, what it actually does for us—is also eternal. Nobody is going to tell Jesus who is fit or not for membership in the family of God, because he gets to determine that. There's no one that's going to stop him, interrupt him, and correct him. It's just not going to happen. And so, why should we lose faith? All of this is leading to these kinds of questions. This is the book of Hebrews. This whole thing about, "Yes, you're under persecution, but do not lose heart, do not lose faith, hold fast your confession, hold fast your confidence." In other words, believe. *Believe*.

So it all goes back to this notion: why would we ever lose faith? Why would we not be confident? Why would we not hold fast our confession? Why would we not believe? Because all of this depends not on our self, but on Christ. This is where the rubber meets the road—where the whole thing culminates in this fundamental issue. Why would you be worried in someone who provided the perfect solution—who didn't fail at providing the perfect solution because they themselves are perfect—and now is seated in the position of authority to decide whether you're in or out? Because this perfect person did this stuff perfectly for you. It's the whole reason—you are the reason, salvation is the whole reason—he became incarnate. When the whole plan of salvation was proposed, he said to the Father, "I have come, and I will do your will, Lord." He's going to do the Father's will, and the Father looks at what he did and sees that he accomplished it perfectly. He accepted him so that he could rise back through the heavens and take his seat at the right hand of God. Why, in view of all of these thoughts, would we ever lose faith? There's nothing else that's going to beat that. As we're going to see when we get into chapter 6... We're at Hebrews 5:10. We're at the end of our section here for this episode. In the very next verse (Hebrews 5:11), we get into this little section about the falling away (apostasy). And then on into chapter 6, which is the big chapter in the book of Hebrews about falling away into unbelief. That's the one everyone always fixates on about, "Do we lose our salvation or not?"

Look at everything that's preceded this. Why would we ever wonder about this? Why would we ever not be confident that we have eternal life? Well, there's really only one answer. The only thing that's going to separate us from God is if we reject the Gospel, if we lose faith. The only reason we're going to really lose faith is if our eyes get oriented to ourselves, to our performance, to our behavior, to our imperfection. Everything up to this point that the writer of Hebrews has tried

40:00

to tell us—tried to tell you—is that your performance doesn't have anything to do with this question. It's not your performance that results in eternal life. It's the performance of one; it's the performance of Christ. And he performed perfectly—unfailingly—and he is the arbiter now of the salvation question. And if you believe him... This is the only thing God asks. If you believe him, if you embrace the notion that he is the only way, that what he did is the only means of salvation, and you throw yourself upon his mercy—you throw yourself on the very reason that he did what he did and suffered what he suffered—why would he turn you away? To turn you away is to say that he failed, and he didn't fail. The writer of Hebrews wants us to get our minds and our eyes off of our own failures and our own imperfections. We need to cease from our own works, like we heard about last time. We have the wrong thing in focus. And if we have the wrong thing in focus (our own performance, our own failures), then yeah, that's going to lead us into maybe depression, second thoughts, whatever. This is damaging. Having our minds fixed on things that don't have anything to do with eternal life can be used as a tool... it becomes a hazard with respect to this whole matter of keeping believing.

So this is our introduction into the great high priestly idea. We only spent 10-13 verses on it, and then the writer is back to the whole question about this falling away. It's going to be a back and forth kind of thing. And as esoteric as some of this stuff gets with Christ's high priesthood, the whole reason that he's entertaining this is to try to reinforce the point that the question of your salvation is ultimately based on the ability of Christ to provide it, and whether you believe that or not. Those are the issues. Did Christ do what he said he was going to do, what God wanted him to do? Yes. So that one's taken care of. The other one is left open. Do you believe or not? There is no other better sacrifice for sin. God's plan cannot be improved upon. There's nothing more that he can do, and that thought is important for understanding Hebrews 6—really the rest of Hebrews 5 on into Hebrews 6, when he starts talking about falling away. So we'll get into that next time. And so for next time, fix that in your mind—this idea that there is no better sacrifice for sin, there's no other plan. So this is the plan that matters. Do you believe that or not?

TS: What would you say with those who are struggling with this works versus belief? Is it that if you do believe, you naturally want to do good works? It's not just works alone? A lot of people are struggling with this concept.

MH: Yeah, I've actually wondered about (I don't know if it would be during Hebrews or after it) doing a whole episode topically on a number of passages that talk about this whole theme. But I think you're right, I think this is a normal human impulse. When we believe...if we're grateful... We feel bad when we disappoint God because we feel grateful to him for what he's done, and so we don't do what we know he would want us to do, we feel bad. We have to remember that before you would have ever had even a thought... Think about before you became a believer. You didn't have any thought about disappointing

45:00

God. You couldn't have cared less. It never even popped into your head. Well, it was while you were in that state—while that was you—Christ died for you. In other words, the fact that Christ would have gone to the cross on your behalf doesn't matter in any way on your disappointing of him. Because everybody disappoints him. Everybody regularly, habitually, unfailingly disappoints him, but he still did what he did. So the fact that after your salvation you might stumble, you might fall, you might fail, and you're going to disappoint God... hey, God has been there before. Jesus has been disappointed before, and it didn't stop him from doing what was necessary to save you. So why would it affect him in any way now? You can't get in worse condition. You can't get more detached from caring about this at all, and he still did it; he still went through it. So, yeah, I understand what it means to disappoint God and to just feel awful about yourself for doing something or not doing something you should have. But it's not news to Jesus. It's nothing new. He did what he did for you even during the time when that was all he got from you—when he got a steady diet of that thing that's troubling you. He did it anyway. It's not going to change the way he looks at you now.

TS: And that guilt has been abused for control throughout history. I think it would be good for us to do a show listing all of the works passages and kind of go through them...

MH: Yeah, I'd been thinking about that, because it's familiar to me. On the one hand, I agree with you, it has been used in a negative, illegitimate way to keep people in line, or control people, or whatnot. I think, though, sometimes pastors and other spiritual leaders do it for less sinister ways, because they want... It's not that they just want conformity for conformity's sake, but they want people to live the kind of lives they should live, because ultimately that's a good thing for them and for the people around them. But it can descend very quickly into guiltning people into certain actions and certain behaviors are tied to what happens in church. I've certainly seen that. And the opposite is that people will say, "Well, that just means I can do anything I want then, because it's all..." Paul will address that, too. "Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid." As someone who really understands the gospel and believes it and appreciates it and loves God because of it, you're not just going to go stick the sin that you like in the face of Jesus just because you can. That whole approach—living out life now to consume it upon your flesh, yourself, being a totally selfish, self-directed person—I think the New Testament rightly looks at such people and questions the validity of their belief, of their faith. It's still not a performance-oriented salvation, but the question isn't, "Hey, you need to stop doing that bad stuff so you can do enough good stuff to get to Heaven." No, the issue is, do you really believe? Because if somebody really believes, they would be grateful. They would want to be a blessing to the person who gave them this great gift that we call salvation. They're not going to spend their time throwing sin in their face. It's a completely different perspective. I'm thinking about it.

TS: I think this is really important, because I think the guilt factor turns off a lot of new Christians today. They can't get past that, they get stuck in the works, in the feeling guilty, in the feeling bad, that they turn away. They don't want to deal with it.

MH: Right, they're just so burdened.

TS: Yeah, they can't grow in their faith. So, I think maybe we should dedicate some episodes about it, because I really think this is one of the main points that people can't get past or see... I think it's important.

MH: It's pretty high on the list, so I'm betting it's going to happen.

TS: Sweet. That's what I like to hear. Alright, Mike. Next week, chapter 6 and end of 5?

MH: Yeah, we'll finish chapter 5:11 on through chapter 6, because chapter 6 is the big "apostasy" passage. Yeah, it'll be Hebrews 5:11 all the way through chapter 6. So we'll finish up chapter 6.

TS: Sounds good. Alright, Mike. If you haven't done so, please go leave us a review, let us know how we're doing. Just want to thank everybody for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God bless.