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10-23-1977

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Recommended Citation

Vaught, W. O., "The Imperfect High Priest and the World's Perfect High Priest" (1977). *Vaught Sermon Notes: Hebrews*. 26.

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THE IMPERFECT HIGH PRIEST AND THE WORLD'S PERFECT HIGH PRIEST

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF HEBREWS
NUMBER 31
HEBREWS 5:2

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HEBREWS 5:2 "Who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way; for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity."

Verse 1 of this chapter explains the high and sacred office of High Priest. The high priest was chosen by God and was given the privilege of transacting business face to face with God. The office of high priest would run for ten or twenty or thirty years and was an office of great power. It was designed to be by God an office of great potential for good and for great blessings upon the people. All too often the high priest would live beneath the privileges of his calling. When self-righteousness and legalism took over the Jews, this office was greatly abused and at the lowest point of Jewish history, the high priest came to be gangsters of the worst sort.

The Perfect High Priest

We have a great High Priest, even Jesus Christ, who will not just last for ten or twenty or thirty years, but will reign as the Eternal High Priest forever and forever. He will also be King forever and will sit on David's throne forever.

A Memorial To Him

The completed Canon of Scripture is a memorial to our great High Priest who is seated today on the right hand side of God in Heaven. He is the one who supervises the teaching of the Canon of Scripture to the pastor teacher. So the work I am doing in the study and the communication of Scripture is directly related to the great High Priest seated by God in Heaven. It is the pastor-teacher's job to unveil Christ's mind to the people. This will be emphasized in Hebrews 13.

Christ's Priesthood Momentarily Interrupted

Christ was appointed High Priest on the day of his birth and carried that office through his life. He laid it aside the days he was in the grave, and then when he was resurrected, he picked up that office again and will continue in that office forever.

A year in one Moment

Once a year the high priest used to go into the Holy of Holies and offer sacrifice for his own sins and then for the sins of the people. It was called "Yom Kippur", the Day Of Atonement. But Jesus Christ fulfills in every moment of his heavenly ministry as High Priest what the earthly high priest did once a year. No high priest ever sat down in the Holy of Holies, and if he had done so, he would have dropped dead immediately. But once Jesus ascended, he sat down at the holy throne of God and will be our atonement forever.

An Office For Men Only

No woman ever served as a high priest. In the New Testament when the word "pastor-teacher" is mentioned, it is always masculine gender. We would conclude from this that God never meant for a woman to fill this high office. This is one of the reasons why we believe no woman ought ever to occupy the office of pastor-teacher.

It Began With Adam

The first high priest was "Adam." He was to give out Bible Doctrine. Then Aaron was appointed and he often failed, as you know. Aaron's sons, Eleazar and Phinehas succeeded their father in this office. They were not to do all the teaching, but to supervise it and see that it was done. We believers are a royal priesthood because Jesus is our King Priest. He delegates things pertaining to God to the pastor-teacher and this indeed brings the pastor-teacher into a new and high relationship.

The Pastor-Teacher's Authority

The authority of this office is in the fact that he receives his truth from Scripture. His spiritual gift leads him to rightly divide the Holy Scripture and it is in this area where his power lies. Though every believer is a priest, the pastor-teacher is the priest picked out by God to give this truth to others. (This does not mean that teachers in Sunday School and in Theological Seminaries cannot teach the truth of the Word of God.)

In verse one we say that the pastor-teacher "is commissioned" and this means he is picked out by God. His commissioning is "on behalf of men" with reference to doctrine.

Total Priestly Responsibility

The earthly high priest was totally responsible for the direction of the teaching of doctrine. But Jesus Christ, seated at the right hand side of God, is directly responsible for commissioning and directing the activity of the pastor-teacher. It is Christ's task to raise up pastor-teachers and he knows how to do this and he never makes a mistake. Now some may think Christ has raised them up and he has not, but Christ never makes any mistake in raising up those who are to communicate his truth.

COMMISSIONED BY CHRIST TO TEACH

1. The high priest offered up sacrifices for his own sins as well as for the sins of the people. He had an old sin nature and therefore did commit sins and had to offer a sacrifice for his own sins before he could offer a sacrifice for the people's sins. Being a sinner and having an old sin nature did not destroy his priestly function.
2. However there came into history a High Priest who changed this pattern. For about 4,000 years there were high priests on the earth who were responsible for seeing that doctrine was given to the people. Then something happened without any warning. This sudden event was to alert the human race that a new kind of High Priest was on the scene, one without an old sin nature. He had no imputation of Adam's sin. He had not and would never commit an act of sin of his own, either in time or in eternity. This Great High Priest supercedes all other priests and he will forever be responsible for the giving of Bible truth to the world. This will be true in the Millennium also. This is why he personally saw to it that we have a perfect Canon of Scripture with which to work.

3. As our Great High Priest Jesus offered himself up as a sacrifice for the sins of the world. His sacrifice is a fulfillment and a completion of every other sacrifice ever made. They were shadows, he was the reality.
 - a. This is why Christ resisted the Devil's temptations with such great certainty. To have listened to the Devil would have turned him aside from the cross. And no cross would have meant no atonement.
 - b. This is why on the day of what we call the "Triumphant Entry" Jesus didn't fall for the flattery and the suggestions of their quoting of Psalm 118 when they bypassed the cross and urged Christ to take the crown right then and there. He knew that there could be no crown before the cross.
4. The offering of those shadows were used to portray the reality. 1 PETER 2:24 "Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed."
5. Therefore all high priests prior to the time of Jesus Christ were ordained in the human race to deal with shadows. Our great high priest has set aside all ritual in his kingdom except baptism and The Lord's Supper. Christ has replaced all other high priests and that's why we don't have any more ritual in our worship today. Ritual has been replaced with doctrine, line by line and verse by verse teaching. This is the ritual of the church today. Interpretation of the Canon of Scripture is our ritual in a New Testament church.

HEBREWS 5:2 "Who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way; for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity." The word "who" is not found in the greek text so rub it out. The word "can" does appear and is a present, active, participle of "dunamai." It is a customary present and means to be able, to have the ability to do something. It means that it is always this way and will be throughout the entire Church Age. This, in a way, is a little thumb-nail sketch of the history of the priesthood from Aaron all the way down to Christ. They had this assignment and they had the ability to carry it out. God saw to that. The words "able to have compassion" is a present, active, infinitive of "metriopatheo." "Metrio" means moderation and "patheo" means to suffer, to have passion, to have feelings. So it means to moderate one's feelings, to be gentle, to lack harshness. Now the high priest couldn't be gracious like Jesus Christ. The explanation is this--COMPASSION IS NOT AS GREAT AS GRACE. Compassion is a great and noble human virtue, but grace is an attribute of God. The infinitive is used here to let us know that it was God's purpose for the High Priest to have this compassion.

Compassion Doesn't Mean Softness

Bible Doctrine is dogmatic and is not soft and easy. There are those who have the idea that people should be treated with sweet sentimental softness when the Christian message is given. This is not true. Bible Doctrine is always dogmatic. But compassion here for the priest is to study and study and study and beat his brains out so the time will come when he can give adequate teaching to the people. Now that is what is meant by compassion here. Compassion doesn't mean to lie down and let someone run over you, but it means studying and teaching, studying and

teaching. Phinehas was the kind of priest who would stand there and when they brought sacrifices to him he would stop and explain very carefully what the sacrifice meant. Just suppose they brought a pigeon or a dove when they should have brought a lamb or a steer. He would then instruct them and cause them to know the meaning of the sacrifice. They offered sacrifices and taught and this is an illustration of compassion. Compassion is faithfulness to the Word of God. That's my compassion for you in this class.

Able To Be Compassionate

1. The high priest was not only to communicate doctrine but he was to be faithful in this task. Stay at it day after day. Faithfulness is a demonstration of true compassion. (Suppose you come to see me and I bring out and show you the fine steaks that I have in my deep freezer and then serve you spoiled dog food for dinner? That's not compassion. Compassion is my determination to get the doctrine to you no matter how much it costs me.
2. Then it says, "To communicate to the stupid." Here we have a very unusual greek construction. We have a present, active, participle of "agnoeo." We get our word "agnostic" from this word. It means the one who does not know. There was a time when all teachers were stupid but they studied and studied and now they can teach the stupid. So this verse actually says "STUDY FOR THE STUPID."

(Right at this time as I studied this Scripture there came over me a greater desire to teach accurately more than ever before in my life. There was a time when I was a stupid preacher and then God did something to me and I began to study. My daily prayer is that I will not be a stupid preacher.)

Illustration--In the Seminary there are so many courses on "How To Be A Stupid Preacher." They don't actually say that, but they teach them everything except Greek and Hebrew and they substitute so many things for an accurate understanding of the Word of God.

Able To Be Compassionate To The Ignorant Ones

1. The ignorant ones are the born again believers at the moment of salvation. They all start stupid. (That's why we don't give testimonies around here as soon as we are saved. A good testimony of a new convert would be something like this. "I've just been converted and I've discovered that I'm about the most stupid believer in the world." Then if he would just sit down and shut up, that would be a great testimony. All of us are ignorant until we reach super grace.
2. Even the Levitical offerings recognized the stupid believers. They had offerings for the ignorant ones. Leviticus 4.
3. The high priest understood the basis for stupidity in the believer and he knew how to remedy it.
4. Any high priest can fulfill his responsibility when he studies and communicates doctrine.

Next we have the phrase "and on them that are out of the way." This is a dative plural present, passive, participle of "planao." This is something that is even worse than ignorance. This refers to those who had a great religious background. They had been deceived by a lot of trash. They had been fed religion, a lot of junk contrary to truth. This is far worse than being stupid. This is an irrelative present and it means he kept on receiving this trash from religion and just kept on being led astray. Some strange cult believer gets saved but he brings his warped religious beliefs with him and that's far worse than being stupid. So the high priest must feed him straight doctrine which will undo all that was done to him before. So this person must shed some things and must drop off some strange and false doctrine so the truth of the Word of God can flow in. So this says, "Able to be compassionate to the ignorant ones, and to even a worse category, the ones who have been deceived with false religion."

Then this verse goes on to say "For" and this is to explain what is coming. Next we have a conjunction "epoi" and it means "in as much as." Next we have "he himself" and this is the intensive pronoun from "autos". This, in principle, is referring to every high priest that came before Christ. But Christ is greater than any high priest because grace is greater than compassion.

The words "is compassed" is the present, passive, indicative of "peri keimai" and it means to place something around something else, or to be encumbered by something.

Every high priest was encumbered by his own problems. He has family problems, and personal problems and it therefore is necessary for him to study and keep himself in line with God every day. He receives these infirmities from his old sin nature. So the priest must teach himself before he teaches others.

The last words in this sentence are "with infirmities" and it means weaknesses. It is the accusative of "astheneia."

Summary

1. The last phrase "weaknesses or infirmities" anticipates the fact that there is coming a great High Priest, even Jesus Christ, who will not have these weaknesses. No old sin nature, no imputed sin of Adam, and never an act of sin of his own. Jesus is the one exception to Hebrews 5:2.
2. Jesus Christ had no weaknesses. Every other high priest of history had weaknesses because they all had old sin natures.
3. This, therefore, explains the far-reaching importance of the perfection of Jesus Christ, his virgin birth and his sinless life.
4. Christ is the last and unique High Priest.
5. When Jesus Christ came along, he broke the pattern set by all other priests. Let us daily give thanks for our great High Priest.