

Understanding Christ's Priesthood Hebrews 5

Hebrews 5 Introduction

- Last week, the rabbi that wrote Hebrews introduced us to the idea of Jesus as our “great high priest.”
- A priest in the Bible is a go-between, mediator, intercessor, or a liaison – someone to stand between people and God.
- The Bible says we need someone like this because unholy people cannot stand before a perfectly holy God on their own merit.

- Jesus is the perfect Man for the job.
- Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is our ideal great high priest.
- He is perfectly qualified and God the Father has now appointed Him to the task.
- Let's start with **4:14-16** to remind ourselves where we left off.

Hebrews 5 Outline

- Who can be a high priest? 5:1-4
- Why is Christ the ideal high priest? 5:5-11
- Move on to maturity. 5:12-14

Who can be a high priest? 5:1-4

- **5:1 Priest:** One who is set apart to act as a liaison between the people and God.
- His job was to offer the **gifts and sacrifices** – an important part of worship in the times of the Old Testament.

- **5:2 Compassion:** This word is used of “one who is not unduly disturbed by the errors, faults, sins of others, but bears them gently.” (Thayer)
- The priest was a regular person just like the other worshipers. He could understand their spiritual shortcomings because he shared the same shortcomings himself.

- **5:3** On the Day of Atonement the high priest had to offer a bull for his own sin offering before he was able to minister on behalf of the people.
- Though appointed by God to his position, the priest was exactly on the same level as the people with respect to sin and sacrifice.
- His situation before God was equal to theirs.

- **5:4 called by God, just as Aaron was**
- Aaron was the older brother of Moses.
- God made him the first of Israel's priests.
- From that time the priesthood was passed down to his sons and their descendants.
- The high priest was selected from among them.

- Qualifications for becoming a high priest:
 - A high priest must be human.
 - God must appoint him to the position.
- A high priest must be human.
 - No animals
 - No angels
 - No androids
- God must appoint him to the position.
 - Some guys got in trouble for taking the role of a priest without God's permission:
 - **Korah:** He died as a result.
 - **Saul:** He lost the right to have one of his sons follow him as king. David took his place.
 - **Uzziah:** He became a leper as a result.
- The human priests in the line of Aaron were not ideal high priests.
- As we've seen, they had their own sin to atone for, so the sacrifices they offered could only have ritual or symbolic value.
- They never really did the job of cleansing the worshipers of their sin.
- Someone better was still needed to better fulfill the high priest's role.

Why is Christ the ideal high priest? 5:5-11

- **5:5** The rabbi reminds us of Christ's deity.
- He is quoting **Psalm 2:7**, which he already referenced earlier in **Hebrews 1:5**.
- Jesus is God the Father's unique Son.
- As God the Son, He shares the full nature of deity with God the Father.
- **5:6** **Melchizedek** first appears in **Genesis 14** where he is introduced as the "king of Salem" that is, "Jerusalem," and "priest of God Most High."
- Abraham presents him with an offering.
- He next appears in **Psalm 110**, where David prophesies that the Messiah, who will be a king, will also be a priest.
- Read **Psalm 110:1-4**.
- So according to **Psalm 110**, the Messiah was to be both a king and a priest. This raised an curious issue for ancient Judaism.
- The priests were descendants of Aaron and from the tribe of Levi.
- The kings were descendants of David and from the tribe of Judah.
- By connecting Christ with Melchizedek via **Psalm 110:4**, the rabbi explains the prophecy.

- **5:7 godly fear** = reverent submission
- Jesus lived in continual submission to His Father in heaven.
- His very incarnation as a human being was already a serious act of loving submission to the Father's will.
- This "reverent submission" was perhaps most clearly expressed in Gethsemane.
- Read **Matthew 26:36-47**.

- **5:8 He learned obedience**
- In the garden, Jesus *"learnt that prayer can meet with an answer very different from that which is requested ... he took his obedience up to death, to the point beyond which it could be taken no further."*
 - (Hugh Montefiore, Anglican Bishop and Jewish convert to Christianity)

- **5:8-9 He learned obedience**
- *"He [Jesus] learned obedience as He submitted His will to the will of the Father, and we, too, learn obedience when we submit our will to His. Thus, He was 'perfected' or 'made completely ready' to save us."*
 - Chuck Smith, in *The Word for Today Bible*

- **5:9 became the author of eternal salvation**
- Christ finished properly all that He had set out to do, being obedient unto death.
- His resurrection uniquely qualifies Him to serve in the role of high priest for all eternally.
- A human high priest eternally represents us in the presence of God.
- Christ is, therefore, the "source" or "active cause" of our eternal salvation.

- **5:9 To all who obey Him.**
- *"If then we desire that Christ's obedience should be profitable to us, we must imitate him ... no one is precluded from salvation who is but teachable and becomes obedient to the Gospel of Christ."*
 - John Calvin, sounding slightly non-Calvinistic in his *Commentary on Hebrews*.

- **5:10-11 you have become dull of hearing**
- The rabbi's audience has **become dull**.
- They probably started out with greater enthusiasm for their faith.
- This word **dull** means something like "sluggish, slothful, lazy or stupid."
- The rabbi has a lot he feels the need to say to his audience, but he knows that they still might not be ready to hear it.

Move on to maturity. 5:12-14

- The rabbi's audience ought to be farther along in the Christian faith than they actually are.
- They still need **milk**. They need to keep going back over the basics or the ABCs of the Christian life.
- They should be ready for **solid food**. There are deeper, more satisfying, more enjoyable truths that cannot be grasped until we are ready – but more on this next week.

Hebrews 5: Conclusions

- From **4:16**: Learn to come boldly before God's throne in prayer – the throne of grace – to receive the help from God that you need.
- This is one of the key benefits to us at present of Christ's high priesthood.
- Let's make full use of it.

- **The Priesthood of Believers:**
 - This principle declares that it is the privilege and freedom of all believing Christians to stand before God in personal communion through Christ.
 - We directly receive forgiveness without the need to go through any other human intercessors.
 - As priests, believers can directly offer sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving to God and minister to the needs of others.
 - Pastors do not differ from other believers in spiritual status, but only in their specific duties and position in the church. See **1 Pet 2:5, 9**

- Like Jesus, we can learn to have compassion on those who are ignorant and going astray.
 - **Ignorant** – We should keep in mind that there are many things that we also don't know or understand.
 - **Going astray** – We should keep in mind that we are prone to sin like everyone else.
 - It is our privilege to intercede for the people that God places in our path.

- Learn to express "reverent submission" to the will of God. Jesus' prayers in the Garden of Gethsemane were heard, but not answered in the way He first expressed.
- Still, He was willing to go the route that the Father had ordained for Him.
- Think how perfectly this prepares Jesus to identify with us when our desires or prayers are not exactly in line with God's will.
- Following Jesus, we need to be obedient to the will of God.
- Even if we hate sin when we see it in others, we find it so easy to downplay the devastating effect that sin has in our own lives.
- God asks us to "put to death the deeds of the body" so that we might live.
- Concluding Passage: **Romans 8:12-17**