

Christ, the Qualified and Perfect High Priest
Hebrews 5:1-6
Part One

We are presently studying the Book of Hebrews. This book was written by an unknown author to a group of struggling Hebrew Christians living in Rome, who under a great persecution were considering leaving the Christian faith in order to return to Judaism.

The author, in response to this struggle, wrote this particular book in order to strengthen their faith so that they, in having their faith strengthened, might be able to persevere.

And what was at stake? Their souls, for if they did not persevere it would demonstrate that they never truly possessed genuine living saving faith, that kind of faith that is given by God and is protected by God. So obviously there was a lot at stake in the mind of this author as he penned this letter.

So how did the author within this letter go about strengthening the faith of his readers? He focused on Christ's superiority in matters related to Judaism.

So, what have we seen so far? We have seen that Christ is superior to the Old Testament prophets in **Hebrews 1:1-4**. We have seen that Christ is superior to the angels in **Hebrews 1:5-2:18**. We have seen that Christ is superior to Moses in **Hebrews 3:1-4:13**. And now we are seeing in our ongoing examination of this epistle that Christ's priesthood is superior to all other priesthoods (Hebrews 4:14-10:18). This began in **Hebrews 4:14** and will continue all the way down through **Hebrews 10:18**. So, what have we seen so far?

The author, in Hebrews 4:14-16, focused his readers on Christ's heavenly high priestly ministry. These verses served as an overlapping transition that tied what he had said earlier in the epistle about Christ's high priestly ministry to what he was about to say about it in the chapters following.

So now let me read these transitional verses for you. **“Therefore, since 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 cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who**

has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. (16) Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

The readers of this epistle, as I have said, were undergoing a great persecution. Their faith was being severely tested and they were losing strength. So, what did this author do in **verse 15**? He exhorted them to hold fast their confession, reminding them that they had a **“great high priest who had passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God”** and what, according to **verse 15**, characterized this great high priest who had passed through the heavens? He was a sympathetic high priest.

When people are struggling and feel as if they are losing strength, it is a wonderful thing for them to know that they are not alone. It is a wonderful thing for them to know that there might be someone who is sympathetic toward them and would very much inclined to help them, if they had the opportunity to do so.

And in the case of believers, such as these readers, there is someone. And who is that? Jesus, the Son of God, our great heavenly high priest, is that someone.

And what are we to do in light of this truth? According to **verse 16** we are to draw near with confidence to God’s throne of grace or in other words we are to pray, knowing that Christ through His death has made it possible for us to approach His Father’s throne and that Christ through His exaltation has made it possible for us to be sympathetically received by His Father. And why would that be? It is because Jesus, the Son of God, the one who has passed through the heavens and who is now seated at the right hand of His Father, is our sympathetic high priest.

And what will we receive when we draw near to that throne? We will receive grace, or in other words we will receive all that we need in order to do the will of God. And this is what these Hebrew Christians living in Rome needed. They needed help from God so that they, in the midst of a great persecution, might be able to hang on to their confession.

So after the author had put forward this overlapping transition in **Hebrews 4:14-16**, what did the author do next? The author then plunged into the

depths of Christ's high priestly ministry, beginning in **Hebrews 5:1** and continuing all the way through **Hebrews 10:18**. And why would this author do this? The author was attempting to demonstrate to his readers that Christ's priesthood is superior to all other priesthoods, with the hope that this truth might become the means by which God would strengthen their faith thus providing for them the grace they needed to continue to hold fast their confession.

So obviously this is a very lengthy section of Scripture but fortunately the superiority of Christ's priesthood can be divided into two parts. So, what was the first part?

The first part addressed the Son's appointment as high priest according to the order of Melchizedek (Hebrews 5:1-10; 7:1-28). So how did the author begin to unfold this particular section of Scripture?

The author, in Hebrews 5:1-10, began with a simple introduction. And it is this introduction that we will be examining over the next two weeks. So how did he start it?

The author in, Hebrews 5:1-4, outlined for his readers universal principles of high priesthood.

So now let me read for you **Hebrews 5:1-4** and see if this is not so. **“For every high priest taken from among men is appointed on behalf of men in things pertaining to God, in order to offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins; (2) he can deal gently with the ignorant and misguided, since he himself also is beset with weakness; (3) and because of it he is obligated to offer sacrifices for sins, as for the people, so also for himself. (4) And no one takes the honor to himself, but receives it when he is called by God, even as Aaron was.”** So within these verses did the author outline universal principles of high priesthood? Yes, I believe he did.

So why was the author moved by the Spirit at this point in our text to outline universal principles of high priesthood? These universal principles were put forth to provide a foundation that would be used by this author to demonstrate to his readers that not only did Christ fulfill all the universal principles of high priesthood outlined in these verses, but as we will see in **Hebrews 5:5-10** that He more than fulfilled them thus making Him superior

to all other Jewish high priests. So let us now begin to look at these principles. And what was the first one?

The high priests were taken from among men (Hebrew 5:1). We see this principle in essence stated at the very beginning of **verse 1, “For every high priest taken from among men.”** So where were the high priests taken from? They were taken **“from among men.”** In other words, they were not celestial beings. They were just simply flesh and blood men.

But it was not just from any group of men from which these high priests were taken. Let me read for you the words of God spoken to Moses in **Exodus 28:1. “Then bring near to yourself Aaron your brother, and his sons with him, from among the sons of Israel, to minister as priest to Me.”** Aaron, the brother of Moses, was the first high priest of Israel and every subsequent high priest of Israel, under the old covenant, was a descendant of Aaron and there was no subsequent high priest that was not.

But even though every high priest of Israel was taken from the descendants of Aaron, under the old covenant, it certainly does not negate the fact that every high priest, under the Old Covenant, was taken from among men, which was the first universal principle.

So, what was the second principle of high priesthood that this author outlined for his readers? The role of the high priest was to represent the children of Israel in matters related to God, especially pertaining to gifts and sacrifices (Hebrews 5:1). We see this principle also in **Hebrews 5:1. “For every high priest taken from among men is appointed on behalf of men in things pertaining to God, in order to offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins.”** So, was the role of the high priest to represent the children of Israel in matters related to God, especially in matters pertaining to **“both gifts and sacrifices for sin?”** Yes!

So, what did the author have in mind when he spoke of **“gifts”** and **“sacrifices?”** Although it is suggested that the **“gifts”** referred to peace and grain offerings and the **“sacrifices”** referred to “animal sacrifices,” the terms probably were used synonymously for sacrifices offered up for sins in general, since the phrase **“for sins”** was a qualifying phrase for both words.

This work of offering up sacrifices for sins was integral to the work of the high priest, as well as other priests who were descended from Aaron. I believe this is made clear to us in **Exodus 29:1-6** as well as **Leviticus 1-6**.

But even though this is so, that the offering up of “**gifts and sacrifices for sin**” was integral both to the work of the high priest, as well as all other priests descended from Aaron, it was only the high priest who was permitted under the Law to enter the inner sanctuary of the tabernacle, or in other words the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement to offer sacrifices to God on behalf of His people for sins committed the previous year. This work done on the Day of Atonement by the high priest is described for us in great detail in **Leviticus 16:1-25**. And it was this work that separated the high priest from all other priests and that made him so very special.

So, what was the second universal principle of high priesthood that the author outlined for his readers? The role of the high priest was to represent people in matters related to God, especially in matters pertaining to gifts and sacrifices for sin. So, what was the third principle?

The high priest’s weakness enabled him to deal gently with the people (Hebrews 5:2-3). So now let me read for you **Hebrews 5:2-3** and see if this is not so.

“He can deal gently with the ignorant and misguided, since he himself also is beset with weakness; (3) and because of it he is obligated to offer sacrifices for sins, as for the people, so also for himself.”

So did these verses tell his readers that the high priest’s weakness enabled him to deal gently with the people? Yes! So now let us consider a couple of points that are interesting, in respect to what we just read.

First of all, notice how this author described the people the high priest was representing when he offered up “**gifts and sacrifices on their behalf.**” He described them as “**ignorant**” and “**misguided.**” So why would he describe the people in this way? He described them in this way because the sins that the high priest offered sacrifices for, whether that was during the year or on the Day of Atonement, were not for sins committed intentionally but rather unintentionally, which I believe can be supported from **Numbers 15:27-31**.

This is why the author described the people that the high priest was offering sacrifices for as **“ignorant”** and **“misguided”**.

So how could the high priest in offering up sacrifices for ignorant and misguided people do so with a spirit of gentleness? Let us continue to read **Hebrews 5:2-3**. **“He [the high priest] can deal gently with the ignorant and misguided, since he himself also is beset with weakness; (3) and because of it he is obligated to offer sacrifices for sins, as for the people, so also for himself.”**

So based on the teachings of the Old Testament, when would the high priest have offered up sacrifices for his own sin? First of all, he would do so whenever he became aware that he had committed a sin in some unintentional way, and secondly, he would always do so on the Day of Atonement when he, just prior to offering up sacrifices for the people of Israel, would first of all offer up sacrifices for himself and his family.

This is why the high priest in offering up sacrifices on behalf of the ignorant and misguided people of Israel, whenever that might be, could do so with a spirit of gentleness for he himself suffered from the same malady or in other words he shared the same weakness.

So, what was the next principle of high priesthood? God by divine appointment conferred the office of high priest (Hebrews 5:4). Let me now read for you **Hebrews 5:4** and see if this is not so. **“And no one takes the honor to himself, but receives it when he is called by God, even as Aaron was.”** So based on this verse, was God the One who by His own divine appointment conferred the office of high priest? I believe so.

A person did not become a high priest because they wanted to become a high priest or because someone else wanted them to become high priest, but rather it was because God wanted him to become high priest. We saw this already in **Exodus 28:1** and the very same truth is repeated in **Leviticus 8:1** and **Numbers 16:5**.

In other words, the position of high priest derived from divine authority rather than human authority, or we could say it this way; God, beginning with Aaron, **“divinely appointed”** or **“called”** every high priest based on their lineage from Aaron.

So the author has now outlined for his readers universal principles of high priesthood, and he is now ready to show his readers how these universal principles apply to Christ. But there is a problem that must be first of all overcome. If the high priests were divinely appointed and were divinely appointed from the descendants of Aaron, how could Christ be a divinely appointed high priest since Christ was not from the tribe of Levi but the tribe of Judah according to numerous biblical references?

The author will now address this problem in **Hebrews 5:5-6**. And how will the author do this? The author in Hebrews 5:5-6, seeking to establish that Christ was in fact a divinely appointed high priest, focused on the glory bestowed by God on His Son when He appointed His Son as high priest.

So now let me read for you **Hebrews 5:5-6** and see if this is not so. **“So also Christ did not glorify Himself so as to become a high priest, but He who said to Him, ‘You are My Son, today I have begotten you’; (6) just as He says also in another passage, ‘You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.’”** So did the author in **Hebrews 5:5-6** focus on the glory bestowed by God on His Son when He appointed His Son as high priest? I believe he did.

So now let us look at these verses more carefully, beginning with **verse 5**. And how does it begin? **“So also Christ did not glorify Himself so as to become a high priest.”**

Notice the word **“glorify.”** The verb “glorify” (DOXAZO) is used only one time in this epistle and that one time is here. But the noun form occurs numerous times. In **Hebrews 1:3** the author spoke of Christ as being the **“radiance of God’s glory.”** In **Hebrews 2:7 and 9** he spoke of Christ as being **“crowned with glory.”** In **Hebrews 3:3** the author spoke of Christ as being **“worthy of more glory than Moses.”** And in **Hebrews 13:21** the author spoke of Christ as the one to whom **“glory”** should be described **“forever and ever.”** In each instance the glory comes to Christ from another party or parties. Christ never garners glory for Himself. And certainly that was the case when the Father bestowed on Him the glory of the high priesthood.

So after having stated this fact, how did the author go on to prove this fact? He quoted two Old Testament Psalms. The first Psalm was **Psalm 2:7** that

he quoted at the end of **verse 5**. And the second Psalm was **Psalm 110:4** that he quoted in **verse 6**. Both Psalms contain prophetic pronouncements by God the Father to His Son.

So, what was the first prophetic pronouncement of God the Father to His Son as recorded for us at the end of **Hebrews 5:5**? **“You are My Son, today I have begotten you.”** This prophetic pronouncement, in essence, very clearly communicated that it was not Christ who raised Himself nor exalted Himself to God’s right hand but rather it was His Father who raised Him and exalted Him. And how would this prophetic pronouncement have communicated all of this?

Based on upon the words of Paul in **Acts 13:32-33**, the day that God had begotten His Son would have been the day that God raised His Son and subsequently exalted His Son to His right hand. This is why I believe that we can say that this prophetic pronouncement in **Psalm 2:7** and that was quoted at the end of **Hebrews 5:5**, in essence, communicated that it was not Christ who raised Himself nor exalted Himself to His Father’s right hand but it was His Father Himself who raised Him and exalted His Son to His right hand or in other words glorified Him for that would have been what the words, “You are My Son, today I have begotten you,” would have communicated, based on **Acts 13:32-33**.

But even though **Psalm 2:7** might clearly communicate that it was God the Father who raised His Son and exalted His Son and thus glorified His Son, the Psalm did not specifically declare that when He raised Him and exalted His Son that He necessarily appointed His Son as high priest. And this brings us to the second prophetic pronouncement of God the Father to His Son as recorded for us in **Hebrews 5:6**. So, what was this second pronouncement? **“You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.”**

This pronouncement clearly communicated that when God the Father resurrected His Son and exalted His Son, He also appointed His Son as high priest, not according to the old order of priesthood but according to an entirely new order of priesthood or in other words according to the order of Melchizedek who according to **Genesis 14:18-20** was, prior to the giving of the Law, both a king and a priest to God. We will learn much more about him later in this epistle.

But for now let me just simply say this: It was upon this model, the Melchizedekian model, that a new order of priesthood was established, not an order of priesthood that flowed from the Old Covenant and its animal sacrifices but rather an order of priesthood that flowed from the New Covenant made possible through the blood of Christ.

And it was this order of priesthood, this superior order of priesthood, that God appointed His Son to be forever a priest.

The author outlined a number of universal principles of high priesthood in **Hebrews 5:1-4**. One of those principles was that God by divine appointment conferred the office of high priest. Under the Old Covenant God made those appointments from the Son of Aaron. But under the New Covenant that has all changed after Christ paid the debt of our sin on the cross. For after He paid the debt He was resurrected by His Father, He was exalted by His Father, and then was appointed by His Father as our great heavenly high priest, not according to the old order of priesthood, but according to an entirely new order of priesthood, that would be and continues to be far superior to what preceded it.

So where is Christ now? He is at God's right hand. And what is He there to do? He has been appointed by God and given this glorious position of honor as our great heavenly high priest in order to serve us.

So how can we, in light of this fact, honor Christ and thus honor His Father? We can, in light of this fact, honor Him and thus honor His Father by drawing near with confidence to His Father's throne of grace so that we through Christ might find the grace to help in the time of our need.

And if we choose not to draw near to God's throne of grace through Christ in the time of our need, will that honor Christ and His Father? No, it will dishonor them.

May God give us the grace to understand that coming to Him through Christ will not only serve us but it will also honor Him, as well as His Son, whom He has placed at His right hand to serve us.