

# OpenTheo

## Hebrews 5



### Hebrews - Steve Gregg

In this presentation, Steve Gregg discusses the book of Hebrews and focuses specifically on chapter 5. He notes that the author of Hebrews later hints at the topic of Melchizedek in chapter 7, and suggests that this connection should be taken into consideration when interpreting chapter 5. While Hebrews 5 has traditionally been interpreted as a warning against spiritual immaturity, Gregg proposes that it may also be read as a statement about Jesus' priesthood according to the order of Melchizedek. Overall, Gregg encourages a careful and nuanced approach to interpreting Hebrews 5, and raises thought-provoking questions about its significance.

### Transcript

Let's turn to Hebrews chapter 5 right now. Just as a reminder, we've had the introduction to the concept of Jesus as the High Priest as far back as chapter 2 in verses 17 through 18. This actually is the main theme of the book of Hebrews, is that Jesus is our great High Priest.

It is a theme that is presented in a matrix of argument against going back to the Old Testament priesthood. The audience of the book originally are apparently Jewish Christians who are waffling in their commitment and thinking about maybe going back after all to the system they left behind. It was, after all, a divinely ordained system, was it not? Couldn't they just go back and live as they did before and avoid the persecution that they're receiving for following Christ? This is how they seem to be thinking and the concern that the author has.

Now, he makes his main point against that by pointing out that Jesus is the final, ultimate, superior, and eternal High Priest, which of course has rendered all other priesthood, which is what the whole temple sacrifice is about, obsolete. That's the message. In the course of getting this across, of course, the author has taken the tact of showing that the things associated with the Old Covenant and the persons associated with it are, in every case, inferior to Christ.

Therefore, those who already have Christ are taking many steps backward if they

abandon Christ in order to substitute with this inferior system that they came out of. He's shown in chapter 1 that Christ is superior to the angels and also in chapter 2. From time to time, as he's making that case, he interrupts himself to talk about the great danger that exists of falling away. By the end of chapter 2, he has finally introduced briefly what is going to be his main theme, but he is so occupied with other aspects of his argument that he interrupts himself and doesn't come back to it until the end of chapter 4. Once he has gotten to it in chapter 4, he actually gets a run at it in chapter 5, but he interrupts himself again before the end of chapter 5 and all the way through chapter 6. He deviates from the topic and then he comes back to it in chapter 7. Once he's back to it in chapter 7, he's pretty much permanently back, although there will be other sections of warning about falling away.

Once we get to chapter 7, he's on the beam of what he wants to be talking about and what he's kind of been hinting at in a few earlier places. One of those earlier places is where we're looking right now, the beginning of chapter 5. Now, to get the proper context for chapter 5, we need to look again just briefly at what is said in chapter 2 at the end of the chapter and at the end of chapter 4. At the end of chapter 2, verses 17 and 18, the author has said, and this is his first mention of Jesus being the high priest. This is the only book in the Bible that refers to Jesus as a high priest.

This is the first reference in all of scripture to Jesus being our high priest. A very important topic is broached here for the very first time in chapter 2, verse 17. Now, he makes reference to the propitiation that Jesus makes, which is the sacrifice of atonement.

This, no doubt, is in the author's mind the counterpart of what the high priest did on the day of atonement, you know, Kippur, when he went into the Holy of Holies. This certainly will be the scene that is in mind in chapter 9, and it no doubt is here too. Christ, you know, he's the high priest, not just a priest.

In the Jewish system, there were priests active every single day of the year, all day long. There were priests offering sacrifices, burning incense in the tabernacle or the temple, and so forth. A priest was an ordinary official in the tabernacle who was doing stuff every day.

The high priest was the special guy one day a year who went into the Holy of Holies. In bringing up that Jesus is the high priest, the focus is not just on what the high priest might have done any other day of the year, but what the high priest uniquely does in the Jewish system, and that is entering the Holy of Holies to make atonement for the nation. So, in referring to Jesus as the high priest, it almost automatically focuses on the issue of the atonement, the day of atonement, you know, Kippur, and Christ's fulfillment of that particular ritual.

So, Jesus makes propitiation for the sins of the people, he says in verse 17. Then, of

course, he moves into other subjects or, you know, deviates a little bit into some other important things he feels like he has to say, and he returns to this same point. At the end of chapter 4, verse 14.

Seeing then that we have a great high priest, this then is the second time in scripture that Jesus is called the high priest, and he's returning to that point. Who has passed through the heavens. Now, Jesus passing through the heavens is a reference to his ascension into heaven.

He passed through the clouds, as we know, because it says in Acts chapter 1 that Jesus was viewed by the disciples being carried up, and the clouds received him out of their sight, and they saw him no more. So, the clouds were like the veil. When the high priest went into the Holy of Holies, he disappeared from view.

The worshipers knew he was there, but they didn't see him anymore. He was in the Holy of Holies, sprinkling blood on the mercy seat on their behalf. The writer of Hebrews indicates that's what Jesus is doing on our behalf.

He's making intercession for us in the presence of God. And so, his ascension through the clouds is analogous to the high priest going through the veil into the Holy of Holies. He's disappeared from view.

And it says he has passed through the heavens. Jesus, the son of God, since we have him, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses.

And this, again, is what it said back in chapter 2, verse 18. Where it said, for in that he himself has suffered, being tempted, he is able to aid those who are tempted. He's been through what we've been through, so he's sympathetic.

And that's what it says here. We do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize. Because he was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.

Let us, therefore, come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need, he says. And, of course, the chapter divisions are artificial in the Bible. The writers of Scripture didn't write in divisions of chapters and verses.

Those were added later for ease of reference. From this point, he just continues. In what we call chapter 5, verse 1, he's just continuing on from what he just said.

He says, for every high priest taken from among men is appointed for men in things pertaining to God. That he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins. He can have compassion on those who are ignorant and going astray, since he himself is beset by weakness.

Because of this, he is required, as for the people, so also for himself, to offer for sins. And no man takes this honor to himself, but he who is called by God, just as Aaron was. Now, this set of verses is summarizing things that are true of priests generally.

Aaron's priesthood, it ends with, as Aaron was. Aaron and his sons were the priests of Israel in the tabernacle system. There are things that were true of them, and some of these things were summarized.

Just like later, he's going to summarize a few things about Melchizedek in chapter 7, at the beginning of 7. He's going to take the few things we know about Melchizedek, put them all together in one place, and then expound on them. He's doing the same thing with Aaron here. Here's a few things we know about Aaronic priests.

First of all, they're human. They're chosen from among men to represent those men to God. This is what a priest does.

A priest is a mediator between men and God. And there's a reason why Catholics refer to their clergymen as priests, and Protestants do not. It's not just a matter of using different words.

A Protestant might call the man in their pulpit the minister, or the pastor, or the preacher. There's a lot of different words that we can use almost interchangeably, but priest is not one of them. Because a priest specifically mediates between God and man, and stands as a buffer between the sinner and a holy God.

Roman Catholics call their clergymen priests because they believe that they're actually doing that. They believe that you can't go directly to God, you have to go through the priest. You can't just confess to God and get away with it, you have to go to a priest and confess.

The priest actually, in a Catholic church, offers a sacrifice. That's what priests do. Now, in our Protestant churches, we don't have an official who offers some kind of a sacrifice there.

But the priest, when he offers the sacrifice of the mass, is presenting the body and blood of Jesus, again, as a priest would offer a sacrifice. Catholics have a different viewpoint than Protestants on this. And I believe that what the writer of Hebrews is getting at is supportive of more of a Protestant mentality about this than a Roman Catholic.

Because he says Christ is the one who is the high priest, he's the mediator. In the Old Testament, there were priests who stood between man and God. God would select a man from among them to represent him, God, and the people to each other.

Jesus has that in common with other priests. The things that he says about priests here, in verses 1-4, are a combination of things that are shared characteristics of other priests

and Christ. In other words, ways that he is similar to other priests, but also deliberately some contrast between the kind of priest he is and the kind they are.

We just have a summary of things that are true about priests in general. Some of them are similar to Christ, and some are dissimilar. That he was chosen from among men is true.

Jesus is a human being. God didn't send an angel down to serve as a high priest. He chose a man.

He created a man. He birthed a man himself to be our priest. So he's chosen from among men, not from among some other species or some angelic entities.

That he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sin. That's true of Jesus also. Verse 2 says he can have compassion.

He's talking about priests in general. Because any priest, being a human, has the same human weaknesses that the worshippers have. He may be chosen with the privilege of going to God for them, but he's still just a man and he knows what it's like to be a man.

He can sympathize with them because he's got all the same weaknesses they do. And that also has been pointed out to be true of Christ. Both in chapter 2 and chapter 4 it's pointed out that he is a sympathetic high priest because he's suffered.

He's been tempted, like we are. And therefore, so far, verses 1 and 2 tell us things that are true of all priests, including Jesus. In this sense, Jesus qualifies to be a priest like everyone else who is a priest.

And his duties are analogous to that. Verse 3 says because he is required as for the people, so also for himself to offer for sins. Now this is different.

The high priests in the Jewish system were sinners also. And therefore, the sacrifices they made had to be for themselves. In fact, they had to go through a consecration service when they entered the priestly office where certain special sacrifices were offered just for their sins.

They had to go through this cleansing on their own before they could even enter the office of a priest. We read about that consecration and its rituals in Exodus and later in Numbers too when they actually do it. But the point here is now we're starting to see some divergence in the analogy.

Christ is chosen from among men. He has got human weakness so he can be sympathetic. He mediates between people and God.

He does so by offering gifts and sacrifices. In this case, himself is what he offers. So these are the ways that Christ can be viewed as a priest because all priests do this and

Jesus does this.

But then we start to diverge a little bit. It's a little bit like when in chapter 3 he was talking about Moses. There's some things, first of all, that are similar between Christ and Moses.

Christ was faithful to him who called him and Moses was faithful in all his house. That's similar. But then he goes into the dissonance.

But Moses was like a house that Jesus built. Jesus has more honor than Moses because a man who builds a house has more honor than the house he builds. As the creator of Moses, Jesus is dissimilar from Moses and superior.

So what the writer does is he'll take someone like Moses, or in this case Aaron and the priest, and say, now here's the ways that they're similar. But they aren't entirely similar because you begin to see superiority on Christ's side as opposed to the other side. He's superior to Moses.

He's also superior to Aaron because Aaron had to have offerings offered for his sins. Jesus will not for his. And it says in verse 4, no man takes this honor on himself but he was called God just as Aaron was.

Now in this sense he's again similar. God called Aaron. Aaron didn't volunteer.

He didn't put in an application for the job. God told Moses, your brother Aaron, he's the one. Aaron might have had other plans for his life.

But that's his problem. He's got to do what God calls him to do just like anyone else. God called Aaron to be a priest.

Didn't matter whether he liked it or not, whether it was his first choice of a profession. Whether that's what he really had in mind for his kids to do, that's what they're going to do. God appoints the priest.

Now Jesus is appointed too and this is a point of similarity. Verse 5 says, so also Christ did not glorify himself to become high priest. So there's the parallel.

Aaron didn't apply for the job. Jesus really didn't either. He didn't make himself a high priest.

He was not opposed to it and as far as we know Aaron wasn't opposed to it either. But Aaron couldn't consecrate himself and make himself a high priest nor could any other Israelite. Nor did Jesus decide just on his own behalf that he'd become a priest.

This is something that was an appointment given to him by his father. And this is what is pointed out. Christ did not glorify himself to become high priest but it was he who said to

him, you are my son.

Today I begotten you. Now we've encountered this verse earlier in Hebrews. In fact it's the first Old Testament passage the writer of Hebrews has quoted back in chapter 1 and verse 5. I mentioned at that point that the two occurrences of this verse in Hebrews introduced the two Christological movements of the argument.

The first Christological argument is basically that Christ is superior to all things. To angels, to Moses, to Joshua, to all things. And it begins with this quotation from Psalm 2 7. God said to him, you are my son.

This day I begotten you. Now in the first argument he uses that to point out that God didn't say that to any angels. And therefore we introduce the thought that Jesus is superior to angels.

And from there we move on to everything else he's superior to. But the superiority of Christ in general is introduced by the use of this particular verse from Psalm 2 7. The argument now has shifted to the main point of the book and that is the high priesthood of Christ. And the point he makes now from quoting the same verse, Psalm 2 7, is that not so much that Christ is superior, although the argument certainly Christ is superior, but the main point of this argument is that Christ didn't appoint himself to this position.

Though he was superior to all things, he's subject to his father. It was the father who appointed him in this role. And therefore coming back to the same verse which was used to show his superiority over angels, it is now used to show that he is not self-appointed.

It was somebody who said to him, you are my son. He didn't say that to himself. And so we have now the next argument of the book about the priesthood of Christ, Christ being selected by God to be the ultimate high priest.

And this next section of the argument is introduced with the same Old Testament text that introduced the first movement of the argument. So God said to him in Psalm 2 7, you are my son, this day I begotten you. We saw by comparison of Paul's quotation of this verse in Acts 13.

Paul quotes this verse also in Acts 13. And in Acts 13 33, he's preaching in the synagogue of Pisidian Antioch. And he says, and as that God raised up Jesus, it is written in the second Psalm, you are my son, this day I begotten you.

So this day of beginning Jesus, Paul said is a reference to Jesus rising from the dead. A reference to what Paul and Colossians called Jesus as the first begotten from the dead, the first born from the dead, a reference to the resurrection. But the early Christians understood that the resurrection, as important as it was, was only the first stage of his glorification.

The resurrection was the first step out of the grave. The next step was up into heaven to the right hand of God, where he is enthroned as king. And as the writer of Hebrews says, and additionally, as high priest.

Entering heaven, seen one way from most of the biblical writers, was Christ's way of ascending to the throne and taking a kingdom and being the king. He sits at the right hand of God, enthroned, he's the king there. The writer of Hebrews says, yeah, he's not only a king, he's also a priest.

And his ascension to heaven also was his inauguration into the priestly role. And so this statement, you are my son, today I begotten you, is a reference to the resurrection as the precursor to the ascension, which is his being placed in position as high priest, as well as being in the position of king. So this verse is an appropriate one to establish that Jesus was made a high priest by the order of his father.

After all, it's the father who said this to him. He's like Aaron, he didn't appoint himself. And he also says in another place, now this place is Psalm 110 verse 4. You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.

Now the writer of Hebrews is on solid rhetorical ground here in saying that when Jesus ascended and sat at the right hand of God, he became not only king but priest. Because Psalm 110, which Psalm is the most frequently quoted Psalm in the Bible, that is by New Testament writers. New Testament writers quoted a lot from the Psalms, more from the Psalms than from any other Old Testament book.

But of the Psalms, the one they quoted most often or allude to was this one, Psalm 110. Though they usually quoted verse 1, which is, The Lord said to my Lord, sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool. The verse is not only quoted but frequently alluded to.

Virtually every time the New Testament speaks of Christ being at the right hand of God, it's an allusion to this Psalm. One of the last verses in the book of Mark says, Christ ascended and sat down at the right hand of God. Well, no one saw him do that.

How does Mark know that happened? Because he knew Psalm 110. Psalm 110, God said to Jesus when he ascended, Sit at my right hand. And the early Christians knew that that's where Jesus was.

But that's the same Psalm, which three verses later God says, You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek. So here the writer of Hebrews has drawn something from that Psalm that no other writer of Scripture did. Namely, that when Jesus sat down at the right hand of God as king, there's also in that same Psalm a reference to him being priest.

So that Psalm tells us that Jesus ascended to take a throne and a priestly role. And so



this Psalm is a very important Psalm. And it introduces not only the fact that the Messiah be priest, but it introduces the mysterious element that he is a priest after the order of Melchizedek.

And Melchizedek is one of the most mysterious characters in the Old Testament. There are characters in the Bible who are mentioned more briefly than him, but they're not as important. You see, there are people whose names are simply listed in genealogies.

We don't know anything about them. They're mysterious if we're interested, but we're not interested. Melchizedek, we're interested in, because Melchizedek, Abraham honored.

Abraham viewed Melchizedek as his superior. God said the Messiah be a priest after the order of Melchizedek. Now that makes him interesting.

That makes him intriguing. That makes him important in ways that some name in a genealogy may not be as important. But the problem is we don't have much more about him in the Old Testament than we have in a name listed in a genealogy.

We do have more, but not much more. A few verses only in Genesis 14, where he appears, suddenly, a few things are said, then he's out of the picture again. Then he's mentioned again a thousand years later by the psalmist.

Just the Messiah is a priest after the order of Melchizedek. You never hear about Melchizedek again for another thousand years after that. The guy appears at thousand-year intervals in Scripture.

He meets Abraham 2,000 years before Christ. He's mentioned by David 1,000 years before Christ. Then after the time of Christ, he's mentioned by the writer of Hebrews.

Three really parts of Scripture mention Melchizedek, and they are written a thousand years apart from each other. None of them say much until you get to Hebrews. This is where the writer of Hebrews shows his mettle, shows what kind of a Bible teacher he is.

He's awesome. He takes the little tiny fragments of information about this mysterious character Melchizedek from the Old Testament, and he writes a whole chapter in chapter 7. Every argument he makes is pretty stunning, pretty justified by the information he's basing it on. This man has meditated on Scripture day and night, no doubt.

He's been particularly intrigued by this statement in Psalm 110, verse 4. You're a priest after the order of Melchizedek. What a bizarre thing for David to write. In David's day, there was already a priestly order that God had ordained.

Aaron, there was a tabernacle in David's day. There were priests. There were Aaronic priests.

Why did David ever get the idea that a different kind of priesthood would ever be needed? What's wrong with Aaron's priesthood? Why not just have that perpetually for all time? If there is to be another one, why would David think of Melchizedek, this shadowy, mysterious character that appears briefly without explanation in the days of Abraham and then disappears from the narrative? Where did David get this? I think we have to say that David was inspired by the Holy Spirit. The writer of Hebrews assumes that the statement written by David is God speaking to the Messiah just as verse 1 is of that Psalm. By the way, Jesus himself authorized the inspiration of that Psalm.

When he asked the Jews around him, whose son is the Messiah going to be, do you think? They said, David's son. Jesus said, well, then why did David call him his Lord? You don't call your son your Lord. It's the other way around, more likely.

So why did David say the Lord Yahweh said to my Lord, Adonai, the Messiah, sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool. Jesus quotes Psalm 110 verse 1 and says, this is David referring to the Messiah as his own Lord. So how can he be David's son? Well, of course he is David's son, but what he's getting at is there's more to him than that.

He's God's son, too. Thus, David's son is superior to David. So Jesus is the one who first authorizes the use of Psalm 110 as a messianic statement.

And the other writers of Scripture follow Jesus in that. And this author is the only New Testament writer who goes further and quotes verse 4 of that Psalm and makes a theological treatise out of that. Very intriguing, the insights this man who wrote this book has.

Now, the two verses he's quoted, Psalm 2, 7 and Psalm 110, verse 4, here in chapter 5, verses 5 and 6, both of them are to make the point that he says Christ did not glorify himself to become a priest. He quotes two statements where Jesus' exaltation of that role is said to be God's prerogative. God said, you are my son.

Today, I've put you in this position. God said, you are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek. And so, these two verses are excellent for his point.

This wasn't Jesus' idea, it was the Father's idea, it was God's idea. Now, speaking of Christ in verse 7, it says, Who, in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with vehement cries and tears to him who was able to save him from death, and was heard because of his godly fear, though he was a son, yet he learned obedience by the things which he suffered, and having been perfected, he became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey him, called by God as high priest according to the order of Melchizedek, of whom we have much to say and hard to explain since you have become dull of hearing. Now, it's very clear that the writer has reached the point where he's ready to talk about his main thesis, Christ priest forever after the order of

Melchizedek.

But he catches himself and says, hmm, these people I'm writing to, this is not shallow stuff here. These people are dull of hearing, they're immature. This is deep things of God we're talking about here.

Now, you might remember that Paul, in 1 Corinthians 2, told the Corinthians that they also, because of their immaturity, had not been able to, actually chapter 3 of 1 Corinthians, the opening verse says he had not given them solid food but only milk because they were babes and carnal. But in chapter 2 of 1 Corinthians, in verse 6, Paul says, however, to those who are mature, which is not the Corinthians, they're not mature, but to other people than you, to mature people, we do speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, he says. Even the hidden wisdom that was not revealed to former generations.

And he says, these are the deep things of God. Then he goes on to say, because the natural man, this is 1 Corinthians 2, 14, the natural man cannot receive or does not receive the things of the spirit of God, they are foolishness to him because they are spiritually discerned. Now, what Paul actually says, and no doubt the writer of Hebrews thinks exactly the same way, is that some people are not mature enough to be entrusted with deeper truths.

There are truths that everyone can know, and there are some that only the mature can be trusted with. The Corinthians were not mature, and so Paul wouldn't entrust them with them. He says, I had to feed you with milk and not with solid food because you weren't able, and you're not now able, he says, to endure it.

But he says, but when I'm with more mature people, spiritual people who can spiritually discern things, the deep things of God, he said, those spiritual things can't be received by the natural man, but the spiritual man. They're spiritually discerned things. Those are things I'm not telling you Corinthians about because you're not them.

You're not the mature people I tell these things to. Now, the writer of Hebrews has got this same conflict. He wants to talk about something deep, and it's a good thing that he finally decided to do it or we would never know it because he's the only author in the New Testament who did talk about these things.

But he contemplated whether he ought to or not. Shall I go into this? I have many things to say about this Melchizedek, but you're not really able to hear him very well because you're dull. He's going to go on from there and talk about how they should be teachers by now, but they're just babes.

This leads into his next warning section that you're not really progressing. You may be losing ground. It's the third time in the book of Hebrews that he digresses into a section

of warning about the danger of not growing up in Christ.

It's the contemplation of presenting the Melchizedek priesthood to this audience and the wisdom or lack thereof of bringing this up with this particular group that causes him to elapse into this warning section which begins actually in chapter 5 verse 12, runs through the rest of chapter 5 and all the way through chapter 6. After chapter 6, however, he has ventilated sufficiently his frustration with them. He says, okay, I'm going to have a run at this. I'm going to try to do this.

I'm going to go ahead. You're babes. This is solid food, not milk.

I'm not sure you can stomach this, but hey, I got to get it off my chest. So he goes ahead and writes chapter 7, which is what he's about to write in chapter 5 verse 11. In chapter 5 verse 11, he says, that Christ is called of God as a priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

Now from that statement, he could have gone directly into chapter 7, but he's a sensitive guy like Jesus. You know, when Jesus was in the upper room with the disciples in John 16, 12 and 13, he said to his disciple, I have many things to say to you, but you're not able to bear them yet. However, when the Holy spirit comes, he'll lead you into all truth.

It's a very difficult thing for a teacher to not tell his audience everything he knows. For one thing, you'd like to show off how much you know, but it's not always good for people. A teacher has to be not just willing to spew all the things he knows.

He's got to craft the presentation to the needs and the capabilities of his audience. You shove solid food down a baby's throat and he'll choke on it. And Jesus said to his disciple, I have a lot of things I want to say to you, and this is my last night with you.

I'm going to be crucified tomorrow and it's getting late tonight. And I'd like to say a lot more, but I'm just going to hold off on that because you're not able to endure it yet. I have things to say that you couldn't handle right now.

I'm going to just have to trust the Holy spirit somewhere down the line to lead you into those things I'd like to tell you now, once you're mature enough to handle them. And Paul's the same kind of teacher in 1 Corinthians 3. He doesn't go there. He wants to, but he can't.

You're not ready to receive it. Now the writer of Hebrews, he does what Paul and Jesus don't do. He says, I don't think you can receive this, but I'm going to give it anyway.

Maybe somebody reading this book down the line later is more mature than you can benefit from it. But I'm just, I'm not going to leave this unsaid. And I'm glad that he took that approach, frankly, because not that we are necessarily mature enough to get everything we should out of this, but if it wasn't written down for somebody, we wouldn't

know any of it.

So we see that he, at verse 12, kind of departs again from the main strand of argument and returns to it in chapter 7. But in the meantime, we want to look at some of these verses, verses 7 through especially 10, or especially 7 through 9, because these have some statements that kind of tweak us a little bit. It says in verse 7 about Jesus, In the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with vehement cries and tears to him who was able to save him from death and was heard because of his godly fear. Now that's not the end of the sentence, but it's got some things to look at first before we finish the sentence.

He says that in the days when Jesus was on earth, he prayed, he cried out to God with prayers and supplications, vehement cries and tears. This is almost certainly a reference to Christ's prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, though it's not inconceivable that Christ had many prayer times like this. After all, the Gospels tell us that Jesus sometimes got up a long time before day and got to pray alone, and the disciples weren't there to witness.

They didn't know what he was praying, what he was doing, but this may have been his regular prayer life. He prayed with desperation, which, by the way, is the very best way of all to pray. I think that our prayers are sometimes vapid and powerless because we just don't have any sense of desperation.

We're pretty comfortable. We're not living in a war zone. There aren't bombs falling all around us.

There aren't raiding Muslim hordes coming through, cutting the arms and legs off of our relatives. There aren't communist officials coming in here saying, spit on the Bible or we'll shoot you in the head right now. That's going on somewhere in the world right now.

Christians are facing that. Christians have faced that kind of stuff throughout history. We don't.

It's kind of hard to feel desperate. We say, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth. Give us this day our daily bread.

All of this we can say by memory without feeling any particular need for it because we already have our cupboards and refrigerators full of daily bread. We don't need daily bread today. Check back with me in a week.

I'm not really in trouble right now. My prayers are pretty bland sometimes because I'm not desperate. But the reason I'm not desperate perhaps is that I'm not really in touch with reality.

We are in desperate situations. The church in America is definitely languishing

spiritually, and the church in some of these persecuted countries is thriving. Maybe we're more desperate than we know.

But Jesus had apparently a tone of desperation in his prayers to be desperate before God and say, I'm desperate for you. I have no hope but you. There's no one who can save me but you.

There's no one who can do what needs to be done except you. We're desperate here. That's a good foundation for praying, and that's what Jesus did.

He prayed desperately with prayers and supplications and vehement cries and tears. And if he's referring to Gethsemane, then we know that he even sweat as it were great drops of blood. Later on in Hebrews chapter 12, when he exhorts his readers to persevere in hardship and so forth, he makes this interesting statement.

Verse 4, Hebrews 12 verse 4 says, You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin. This could mean, of course, you have not yet died as a martyr in your struggling against sin, but it could be an allusion to Christ because the previous verse is referring to Christ. It says, For consider him who endured such hostility from sinners against himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.

You have not yet resisted bloodshed as he did. Now, he did resist to bloodshed in the sense that he actually was crucified, but he was shed in some blood before that. And that was in his resistance against sin.

No doubt in the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus was tempted like no other time in his life to perhaps take a different route than God's route for him. And we know he even prayed that if it were possible, God would change the plan. Jesus was very strongly tempted to avoid the cross.

That avoidance was a temptation. And he resisted that. He struggled against that in prayer.

And so great was the strain that he sweat as it were drops of blood. The writer of Hebrews said, You haven't yet struggled against sin that way. He could be referring not so much to the bloodshed of Jesus' death as the shedding of blood in his vehement cries and tears and sweat that was part of his prayer life at that time when he was resisting the temptation to go the wrong way.

And the writer says, You haven't gotten that way. You haven't been that desperate yet. You haven't struggled against sin quite that desperately yet like he did.

He's our model there. But the writer here says in chapter 5 verse 7 that Christ's prayers were like this. And then it says at the end of verse 7, strangely, and he was heard because of his godly fear.

Now this is strange because what he was praying for is to him who could save him from death. Now as it turned out, Jesus, seen one way, wasn't saved from death. He had to go to the cross after all.

What he was actually praying for is to be saved from death. If it's possible, let this cup pass from me was his prayer. Could we change the plan? Could we get out of this? Is there any way to do this? In a sense, his prayer was not answered.

And when it was not, Jesus said, Well, the cup that the Father has given me, shall I not drink it? But he resigned himself to his prayer not being answered. The cup was not going to pass from him. The cup was given to him to drink, and he said, Well, I'll drink it then.

So there's a sense in which we think, Well, the author should have said, Well, but his prayer was not answered because it wasn't the will of God for him to not have that cup. But the author says he was heard. His prayers of being delivered from death were heard.

How so? He died. But, of course, he was delivered from death after that, when he rose. His resurrection was certainly deliverance from death.

What else would you call it? It was deliverance through death. It was deliverance after having experienced death. See, we'd like to be delivered from our trials without going through them.

God has promised he'll deliver us from our trials, but maybe only after they're over. We want him to deliver us from them before they start. And that's not the plan, necessarily.

It can be. Who knows how many things every day God delivers us from that we're oblivious to, how many disasters the devil is trying to bring in our life, but the angel that camps around us, the angel of the Lord encamps around the righteous and delivers them. There may be all kinds of warfare coming against us every minute.

When we're oblivious, we just think everything's wonderful. And it is for us because the angels that God brings are fighting off all the attacks. But there's times when God says, Okay, I'm going to deliver you from this trial, but you're going to go through it first.

Then I'll deliver you from it. Jesus prayed to him who could deliver him from death, and he was heard. God did deliver him from death after he died, not before.

It seems like Jesus' prayer was more of the other way. Like, could we not go that far with this? Could the cup be taken from me? And, well, he didn't get that, but he was delivered from death. He was resurrected.

And that may be what the writer of Hebrews has in mind because it's a surprising statement to hear him say that he was heard. His prayer was heard, which suggests, you

know, heard and answered because of his godly fear. Though he was a son, verse 8 has some other problems in it.

Though he was a son, yet he learned obedience by the things which he suffered. Now, the problem with this passage, of course, is that it says he learned obedience. Now, kids being trained by their parents often learn obedience by the things they suffer, meaning they get disciplined when they do the wrong thing.

They start out disobedient, but they learn to be obedient. And if that's what it means, and it kind of sounds like it means that, then it almost sounds like Jesus started out disobedient, but he went through the suffering, and his father disciplined him, and he learned how to be obedient. Of course, that can't be what it means because disobedience is sin.

And the author has already told us, just in the previous chapter, Christ was tempted in all points as we are, yet without sin, in chapter 4, verse 15. So, the author is not saying that Jesus sinned before he suffered, but he learned not to do that through the things he suffered. He got disciplined, and therefore he learned to be obedient.

He was obedient all the time. He was never disobedient. So, in what sense can it be said that he learned obedience? Well, the term is sufficiently ambiguous.

Such a term could mean he learned to be obedient through the things he suffered, which is what we've been discussing is what it kind of sounds like. Or it could mean something else, that he learned the lessons of obedience. And there are things that one learns about obedience by being obedient.

You can learn obedience by being disobedient and being chastened for it, and then you learn to be obedient. But you learn more about obedience by being obedient. You learn what it costs.

The hardest temptation in the world is one you don't succumb to. Anyone who succumbs to temptation has taken the easy way and cut it short. The person who really knows the strength of temptation is the one who doesn't submit to it, and who fights it to the end until it goes away.

You resist the devil until he flees from you, and that's not always immediate. The strength of the temptation, and the cost of being obedient, is not known by anyone so well as the person who is obedient, and who fights that temptation and does not succumb to it, who puts up the total effort necessary to remain obedient. It's a costly thing to be obedient.

A lot of people aren't obedient enough to even learn that. But he was obedient through the things he suffered for his obedience, not for his disobedience. He suffered because he was obedient to God.



He wasn't persecuted for being bad. He was persecuted for being what God wanted him to be, and the people didn't like that. And by experiencing the sufferings associated with his obedience, he learned more about obedience than most of us will probably ever know, because we've never been quite so obedient.

From within the realm of obedience, you learn more about it than by caving in before you become obedient. If you're disobedient easy, you haven't learned obedience much. You can learn to be obedient after that, but Jesus, I think it's saying that although Jesus was always obedient, he learned what it costs to be obedient.

He learned what it's like to be obedient. By becoming a human being. Before that, he wasn't a human being.

He was a God. Who does God have to obey? God never had to obey anybody. He's the one who gives all the orders.

When he became a man, he had to obey his father. And that being so, he learned what it's like to be obedient to somebody, namely to God. He couldn't have learned that without becoming a man, without going through the sufferings he went through.

He became a PhD in the subject of obedience by suffering so much for it. And I think that that would have to be something like what the author is implying when he says he learned obedience by the things he suffered. And having become perfected.

Now, that again is a problem for us because we think, well, what's wrong with Jesus before that? He wasn't imperfect, was he? But we already encountered in chapter 2 this concept. In chapter 2, verse 10, the author says, For it was fitting for him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the author of their salvation perfect through sufferings. The author of our salvation is Jesus.

God made Jesus perfect through sufferings. Again, we encountered that question. Was he imperfect before that? What was wrong with him before that? And here we have it again in verse 9 of chapter 5. Having been perfected, clearly in the context of learning obedience through suffering.

The suffering of Christ is connected to his being perfected. But remember, when we talk about perfection, we have to say, well, in what context are we talking about perfection? A person may be perfectly obedient to his parents, but not perfect at skateboarding. You might be nearly perfect at skateboarding, but not a very good singer.

You have to ask, what are we talking about perfection here? Perfection in what realm are we talking about? Christ was morally perfect. That was never an issue. That was never a problem.

But he had to be perfected in what? In his role as a priest. Christ, before he came and

suffered for us, never was a priest, really. I mean, there may be some analogies to certain things.

God was like a priest of some sort. But really, by definition, a priest is one who mediates between God and other people. And therefore, God is not the priest.

He's the one that priests come to on behalf of people. So Jesus never really had a priestly role until he became a human being, involving all the suffering that involved, especially the suffering of his death, because that's the sacrifice he offered. A priest has to offer sacrifices.

His sacrifice was his own body on the cross. And so the things he suffered perfected him in the role of priest. It didn't make him a better person than he was before.

It made him better as a priest, though. His qualifications as a priest did not exist until he suffered and had something to offer, like priests have to do, namely his own blood. So there's some statements here that kind of hit us the wrong way when we first read them.

But when you think about what the author is saying and not saying, they're not such a problem, I think. Now, also, in verse nine, it says, having been perfected, he became the author of eternal salvation to all who believe in him, right? Well, that's not what it says. It is true, but it says something else.

It says to all who obey him. We already encountered this earlier in our study of Hebrews, that the term obey and believe, when talking about the terms of salvation, are pretty much interchangeable, because a person who really believes Jesus is Lord will obey. You're not saved by obeying, per se.

You're saved by becoming an obedient person. Now, once you're an obedient person, that doesn't mean you obey all the time, but it means that that's your self-definition. I believe Jesus is my Lord, because I believe that I have responded to his Lordship as becoming an obedient person.

I don't always obey, but that's what I always intend to do. That's because I define myself as a follower of Christ. Because I believe he's the Lord, my belief translates into a commitment to be obedient.

And Christians are obedient to God as a rule, but not with 100% consistency. Christians sin too, and the Bible's aware of that. But certainly Christians who are believers are also called obedient.

That's kind of what distinguishes them from unbelievers, is they're following Christ, they're obeying Jesus. Back in Acts chapter 5, I think it is, Peter and John are before the court. They're before the Sanhedrin, and they're giving testimony there.

And that's where Peter says, we ought to obey God rather than men, in verse 29. But when he is telling this testimony, it may be there or it may be the previous standing before them. I think it's in chapter 5, but they stood before the Sanhedrin twice.

Okay, there it is, verse 32. Peter says to the Sanhedrin, we are his witnesses to these things. And so also is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.

God has given the Holy Spirit to all Christians, has he not? Yet Peter puts it this way, those who obey him, he's given his Holy Spirit to. Now, does this mean that obeying Jesus, a certain amount of obedience is a qualification for receiving the Holy Spirit? Well, one could argue that way from the verse, but I think it makes perfectly good sense to say this. God has given his Holy Spirit to the Christians.

You know, those people who are obeying him. Christians are people who obey Jesus by definition. So as you find in your community, you Sanhedrists, here in Jerusalem, a group of people who are obeying Jesus, that's our group, that's the Christians.

God has given his Spirit to that group of people. That the Christian community could be simply summarized and described as those who obey Christ. I mean, the most natural thing in the world.

After all, Jesus was the King. Jesus is the Lord. That was the profession the Christians made.

What would they do but obey him if he's a King and Lord? And we sometimes lose that a little bit by emphasis only on the faith and not on the obedience. I mean, because some people think that salvation by faith means I've come to believe Jesus is the Savior and Lord, but I'm not sure what the word Lord means, but that's what Christians say, Savior and Lord. And, you know, that he died on the cross and rose again.

A person can easily profess belief in those facts without ever having believed in the sense of salvation. The devil believes all those facts. He's not saved.

People can believe those facts and not be saved too. It's when a person embraces the truth that they believe, that Christ is the Lord. Then, of course, that very embrace issues forth in a different lifestyle of obedience to God.

If that lifestyle isn't there, then that kind of faith isn't there either. Paul said it's a faith that works through love in Galatians 5, 6. James said a faith that doesn't work is dead faith. So it's Paul and James and all the scriptures, certainly Jesus taught this too, that if a person's not obedient to him, they're not really what the Bible calls a Christian.

They're not saved by doing a certain amount of obedient acts. We'd be in trouble if that were the case. Then it'd be salvation by works.

You know, once you've obeyed this much, you can be called a Christian. No, you're a Christian before you've done one act of obedience. But becoming a Christian means that you are now an obedient person from this point on.

The thief on the cross was saved without doing one obedient act except to confess Jesus as Lord. Then he died. If he had lived, he would have lived obediently to Jesus because that's what embracing Christ as Lord looks like.

That's simply the way it works. If he's your Lord, you obey him. So the writer could say, as Peter could say, God has given his Holy Spirit to those who obey him.

The writer of Hebrews could say that Christ is the author of eternal salvation to all who obey him. We might have felt more comfortable if he said to all who believe in him. But there's not a difference.

In the mind of the early Christians, believing in Christ in a way that saves is the same thing as becoming an obeyer of Christ, a follower of Christ, embracing him as your Lord. Okay. Now he says that Christ became author of eternal salvation.

He says in verse 10, called by God as a priest according to the order of Melchizedek. And this reintroduction of this line, which he first quoted in verse 6, sets up the situation to enter into the discussion of chapter 7. What does this mean, Melchizedek? What does this mean, the priest of the order of Melchizedek? But he doesn't get there yet. Instead of going there, he says, I'm really concerned that this may be beyond your level to grasp here because you really are not as spiritually mature as I wish you were.

And we're going to look at him saying that. This verse 12 then, it's the next parenthesis. Chapter 5, verse 12 through chapter 6, all of chapter 6. Verse 20, excuse me.

And the chapter division is unfortunate. This really should have been where the chapter divides, but it doesn't. So since we're trying to take this by chapters primarily, let's look at these verses 12 and following.

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God, and you become need of milk and not solid food. The same terminology Paul uses in 1 Corinthians 3 to distinguish between basic doctrinal stuff and deeper spiritual things that he gives to the mature. The solid food.

For everyone who partakes only in milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he's a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. Now the author doesn't anticipate a chapter division here, and his next words follow immediately after.

We're going to have to break there, but we'll talk about this portion and then come back to chapter 6. Notice he says at verse 12, for by this time you ought to be teachers. This

is basically saying, you know, every Christian should reach a stage of maturity where they can teach other people. Now, not all people are teachers in the sense of the office of a teacher.

Remember Paul said he gave some apostles and some prophets and some evangelists and some pastors and teachers in Ephesians 4, 11. But also in 1 Corinthians 12, he said Christ gave these gifts, first, apostles, secondarily, prophets, third, teachers. And then he says, are all the prophets? No.

Are all apostles? No. Are all teachers? No. Paul, at the end of chapter 12 of 1 Corinthians, indicates that not everyone is a prophet, not everyone's a teacher.

And yet in 1 Corinthians 14, he says to them, you may all prophesy. In fact, you should all desire the best gifts, especially that you may prophesy. That is, prophecy might be a gift generally given to any Christian, but not all are prophets.

You know, a person who's not a prophet can prophesy sometimes. Balaam wasn't really a prophet. He prophesied.

King Saul wasn't a prophet, but he prophesied. Everyone jokes, is he also now among the prophets? Is Saul also among the prophets? Because he wasn't. He wasn't a prophet, but he was prophesying.

Caiaphas even prophesied. He was not a prophet. A person who's not a prophet may at times prophesy, but a prophet is something else.

And Paul says, you're not all prophets, but you may all prophesy. Now, you're not all teachers either, but for the time you reach a certain maturity, you should be able to teach. You should be teachers of a sense.

Not every Christian is supposed to get up and give lectures or Bible studies or be in the role of a teacher in the body of Christ. That's for some and not for others. Others have other gifts.

But every Christian should reach a point of understanding of their faith that they can answer somebody else's inquiries about the faith, at least at some level. Remember, Peter said in 1 Peter 3, 15, sanctify the Lord God in your hearts and be ready always to give an answer to anyone who asks you a reason of the hope that is in you. So every Christian should be able to answer basic questions about why they're a Christian, what Christianity, how that gives them hope and so forth.

Everyone should be able to teach others. At the very least, people should be able to teach their children. And older Christians should be able to teach younger Christians.

Paul said in Titus chapter 2 that the older women should teach the younger women to be

keepers at home, lovers of their husbands, lovers of their children, chaste, good. That is the older women, not those who hold a degree from a seminary, just older Christian women who've been Christians longer. They should teach the younger Christian women.

Teaching is a normal thing for Christians to do, but not all are teachers per se as a vocation. But every Christian should reach a point, the writer says, that you should be teachers by now. You should be able to teach people stuff that you can't.

Not only can you not teach, you need to be reminded of the most basic things. If you knew the basic things, at least you could teach those, but you can't even do that. You need to be reminded.

You're forgetful. You're dull of hearing. He's very frustrated with these readers because, no doubt, because they were falling away.

They're forgetting even what they used to know. And he says, you'll become people who just need milk. You can't eat solid food.

Now, this Melchizedek stuff, that's solid food, I guarantee you. And I don't know that you're ready for that. He said that everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness.

Christians must become skilled in the word to some degree. Not everyone can become equally skilled. But knowing what God said and being skilled in the understanding and presentation of that to others at some level is the responsibility of every Christian.

When a person has no such skill, they're still a babe. They're a babe not because they're not good at expressing their views, but because they don't know their views. They're not skilled at even thinking in biblical categories.

But solid food belongs to those who are full age, older Christians. Not necessarily older than his readers. They were old enough, but their growth had been stunted for some reason.

But older Christians than new converts, full age Christians, solid food is for people like that. Those who by reason of use. Use of what? Well, he's just mentioned that the babes have not become skilled in the word.

Apparently, it's the usage of the word that is here implied. Someone who's put the word of God to use in their life. They've learned it.

They're obeying it. They're processing it. It's becoming part of who they are.

In some respects, they're embodying it. They've used the word of God to full advantage in their lives. And because of that reason of use, they have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

The senses here are not our five senses. Because you don't discern good and evil with your five senses. But you have spiritual senses.

You have a spiritual development as well as your physical development. And as you mature, you develop spiritual senses. Some of them are analogous to earthly senses.

Sight, hearing, taste. All these are used as metaphors in Scripture. Taste and see that the Lord is good.

The pure in heart shall see God. You know, if you will hear his voice. Hear.

But this is all spiritual. He that has ears to hear, let him hear. He's talking about spiritual hearing here, Jesus is.

There are spiritual senses that need to be developed. What then? Those spiritual senses enable you to discern good and evil. Now, in closing, I just want to say this.

A lot of Christians say they have the gift of discernment. And I've never been very impressed with most of the people who say they have the gift of discernment, to tell you the truth. What it means is they trust their suspicions.

It means that they have the gift of suspicion, really. In many cases. And they call that discernment.

Men and women both. Although it seems like women more often than not talk about having the gift of discernment. But I've heard men do that too.

And it means they trust their hunches, their suspicions. Now, women actually sometimes do have more intuition about men. About then men, I should say.

But discerning between good and evil, this discernment is not a gift. It's a function of a mature Christian. Not every Christian has the same gifts.

But every Christian should mature to the point where they can discern good from evil. Discernment is never listed among the gifts. People get this wrong because one of the gifts is called the discerning of spirits.

Which is a term I think Paul uses for judging prophecies properly. He gives the gift of prophecy and a gift of discerning of the spirits, the prophecies. He gives the gift of tongues and the gift of interpretation of tongues.

These are companion gifts. Discerning of spirits, people sometimes think that means I have a spiritual gift that other people don't have. That I can discern spooky stuff that most people don't know is even going on.

I have this discernment. But discerning of spirits is not that. Discerning of spirits is a gift,

just like interpretation of tongues is a gift.

But discernment is a universal endowment of awareness that a mature Christian develops when his spiritual senses are developed by reason of use of the word of God. If you put the word of God to use in your life as you should, you will become more innately discerning of what's right and wrong. You'll be thinking more in God's categories and having God's values and God's way of looking at things.

Therefore, things that you thought were okay before, you might see they're not okay. This is wrong. I wasn't sensitive to that before.

I've developed a new sensitivity to the wrongness of what that thing is that I did before. You can see the churches are often full of immature people who lack this discernment because many of them are sincerely wanting to be Christians, but there are things like judgmental attitudes or things like that that are really wrong, but they don't think they're wrong. They haven't been sensitized to that in the way they will when they become more Christ-like and more mature.

They'll realize, oh, that's not right. That's not the way Jesus is. Maturity means you become more thinking along the lines that Jesus thinks.

You discern and have more of a sense of what's right and wrong from God's point of view. Certainly, very few things are more useful than the word of God for developing that sensitivity. You have your senses developed to discern good and evil.

These people had not really put to use the word of God that they knew. Therefore, they had never gotten to the point where they could go beyond the basics. He's going to continue haranguing them in the next chapter, but it's time for us to break here.

We'll come back to chapter 6 and take one of the more difficult passages in the whole of Scripture, judging by the many people who ask about it and who find it confusing. We'll be right back.