

Introduction – Christianity was born into a very religious world – this included the entire Roman culture – with its own gods, priests, and glorious temples - a temple-less priest-less idol-less worship was practically unheard of, and the early church was trying to live by a faith that spoke of an unseen Christ who had ascended to an unseen temple and caused sacrifices to cease

- This was not only a problem with the surrounding paganism, but also with Judaism and the Mosaic law – the claim of early Christians was that it had its roots in and was a fulfillment of the Hebrew Scriptures
- But now they had (to the visible eye) a priest-less, temple-less, idol-less sacrifice-less religion and the view of ultimate bliss was not to be found in this world, but in a world to come –the radical nature of this “new” religion cannot be underemphasized
- One major purpose of this letter which we call Hebrews was to answer those objections (thus, it is an early apologetic work) – how could a form of worship of the true God like this grow out of Judaism? Unless that is answered, these Jewish Christians will face insurmountable temptation to return to all they have ever known, and all their people have known for thousands of years
- A reminder that the temptation to return to something physical and visible didn’t die with these Jewish believers – the Medieval Age of the church and the artifacts that remain from it are abundant testimony to the Church’s temptation to ever return to a tangible kind of worship – this included (and includes) complicated clothing, worship, priesthoods, and continuing sacrifices in the Mass
- While I am appreciative of, and greatly enjoying the study of those artifacts as works of art (as now seen at the Frist), as objects or means of worship they are unnecessary and even contrary to New Covenant Christianity

## I. NECESSARY QUALIFICATIONS OF THE OLD COVENANT HIGH PRIEST

### A. He Was Appointed by God (5:1, 4)

- **v.1 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**
- Priesthood, in every religion, has to do with sacrifice to appease or satisfy the gods – a priest is a mediator, to represent God before men and to represent men before God
- If there is a God who is offended by human sin, then it is not for man to create his own way to satisfy Him
- It isn’t for humanity to invent what they think will satisfy offended Deity, but there must be a revealing of what is necessary
- The function of priesthood is seen here to be to offer both gifts and sacrifices for sin – there can be no true religion without addressing issues of sin – through the Scriptures (and even seen in pagan religions) gifts and sacrifices are necessary for sin to be addressed
- Illustration: this is seen in our court of law – a guilty offender does not sentences themselves to satisfy the law
- **v.4 And no man takes this honor to himself, but he who is called by God, just as Aaron was.**
- Not only must the sacrifices that will satisfy Divine Justice be revealed, but for one to be the mediator they must be chosen by God – self-representation is not allowed, nor choosing our own – God must appoint
- Under the Old Covenant this representation was designated by God to be from the lineage of Aaron, known as the Aaronic or Levitical priesthood – they weren’t allowed to have just anyone fill that office

### B. He Was to Have Compassion (5:2-3)

- **v.2 He can have compassion on those who are ignorant and going astray, since he himself is also subject to weakness.**
- What was also necessary for a true fulfillment of that office of mediator was that they were compassionate toward those they were representing – humanity needs someone who is not an adversary, but an advocate
- Illustration: you wouldn’t want one who was pro-abortion being the representative in court for a Pro-life group
- What was needed was someone not aware of their own sinfulness, their own ignorance, the reality of their own straying from the Lord to go before God – rather, someone who out of their own difficulties to plead on the people’s behalf for God to have mercy
- Our role as priests sympathetically representing our family, friends, and neighbors
- **v.3 Because of this he is required as for the people, so also for himself, to offer sacrifices for sins.**
- In the case of the Aaronic priesthood, this sympathy and compassion was born out of the fact that when the High Priest entered the temple he had to first offer sacrifice for Himself, and then for others
- There was intended to be a broken intercession out of an awareness of his own weakness, not condemnation born out of a self-righteous attitude

## II. JESUS’ QUALIFICATIONS AS THE NEW COVENANT HIGH PRIEST

- After laying out these two necessary qualifications for a High Priest under the Old Covenant, the writer now explains how Jesus both fulfills and supersedes that priesthood

### A. He Was Appointed By God (v.5-6)

- **v.5 So also Christ did not glorify Himself to become High Priest,**

- **but it was He who said to Him: "You are My Son, Today I have begotten You."**
- Jesus was not a mere man who decided to take upon Himself the priesthood, nor to be accepted and appointed by a group of people, but God Himself appointed Him to become High Priest - John 8:54
- The writer proves this by quoting Psalm 95:11 – this is a reference, according to Acts 13:33, to His resurrection – Jesus is proclaimed as both “Lord and Christ” by Peter Acts 2:36
- The serious problem that arises here is that Jesus is not from the tribe of Aaron, but from the tribe of Judah and descendent of King David
- To address this problem, the writer then quotes Ps110:4, a Messianic Psalm, and speaks of an order of priesthood that was to supersede the priesthood under the Old Covenant
- **v.6 As He also says in another place: "You are a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek";**
- We won't go much more into Melchizedek here (as our author will do so later in the book), but suffice it to say that one of the reason that the priesthood Jesus fills is greater is because it is one in which He is a priest “forever”
- Because He is resurrected, and cannot die, Jesus continues to fill that role and never needs another (in contrast to the Levitical in which the priest always died)

### B. He Has Compassion (v.7-9)

- The writer moves on to deal with the 2<sup>nd</sup> necessary qualification, that of compassion for the people
  - This is also at first glance a problem, as the merely human High Priests had compassion because of weakness born out of a knowledge of their own sinfulness
  - Notice what is necessary to fill the role is not sinfulness, but a sense of weakness (see v.2)
  - What then was the weakness that qualified Jesus to be High Priest? The basic answer is **suffering**
  - **v.7 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,**
  - **v.8 though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered**
  - While the reference to the days of His flesh probably refers to the whole of his life (and we must not forget all of that), this seems to particularly refer to what took place at the Garden of Gethsemane
  - It is an error to downplay the degree of Christ's suffering by limiting it to a few hours – pay attention to what Scriptures say about that suffering – [Is53:5,10](#) [Gal3:13](#) [1Pet2:24](#) He Himself expresses it - [Matthew 26:38](#)
  - We are told His prayer was to the one who could save Him from death – and...we are told He was heard
  - How was He heard? Not from experience of death itself, but its permanency
  - He was heard because of His godly fear, the same we are encouraged to have in 12:28
  - This experience of suffering (like Ps119:71) taught Him obedience – this for one who never experienced disobedience
  - **v.9 And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him,**
  - Then He is said to have been, through this experience, perfected – we shouldn't think of imperfection to perfection, but completion for all that God appointed Him to do, including to have compassion on the weak
  - **Illustration:** we ultimately need training, help, guidance from one who has finished the race, not someone who failed to finish
- **vv.10-11** are transitional into the next section, a rebuke regarding how they need to grow up spiritually (next study)

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## APPLICATION

### Application #1 - HOLD FAST YOUR CONFESSION (4:14-15)

- **Let us hold fast** – seize, grasp; **our confession** – a statement of allegiance, binding agreement, compact, a vow - of which Jesus is the Apostle and High Priest [3:1](#)
- **Illustration:** hold fast to your marriage – not marriage abstractly, but hold on to the commitment to spouse

#### The reasons given are all related to our High Priest

- (1.) Your High Priest is **great** the greatest of all and appointed by God
- (2.) Your High Priest has **passed through the heavens**
- (3.) Your High Priest is **Jesus the Son of God**
- (4.) Your High Priest **sympathizes with our weaknesses**

### Application #2 - COME BOLDLY TO THE THRONE OF GRACE (4:16)

- Why? Because it is a throne **of grace** – it is not a throne of judgment
  - Because it is there you **can obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need**
  - Our greatest need, above all others, is for mercy and grace
- If you are not a Christian, you like every one of us need a Mediator – You need one appointed by God, and one who will be compassionate toward you, giving mercy and grace in your weakness