

Christ Is Superior to the Levitical Priesthood

“Called of God”

Hebrews 5:1-10

These verses outline the qualifications and role of the high priest, particularly focusing on how Jesus fulfills and transcends these roles.

As we consider the role of the earthly high priest in the first four verses, we can see an application for spiritual leadership in the church today. There is the one right interpretation of this text as it applies clearly to the earthly high priest, and there are aspects of the Old Testament priesthood that do not apply, and cannot be applied to the pastor today, but we can find principles here that can be applied, and should be applied, to the pastor and spiritual leaders of the church.

I made a statement a couple weeks ago in our study of the Old Testament high priest that I believe that the pattern used for the New Testament pastoral ministry was that of the high priest, to some extent. Some of those similarities are found in the first four verses of our text in this study.

This text mentions Melchisedek twice: verses six and ten. Although his name appears here, he is dealt with in greater detail in chapter seven so we will set our study of who he was until we get to that text.

I. QUALIFICATIONS OF THE EARTHLY HIGH PRIEST – VS. 1-4

A. Faithful to his office – vs. 1

1. High priests are chosen from among men to act on behalf of people in matters relating to God, offering gifts and sacrifices for sins.

Numbers 16:46–48 [pertains to the murmuring of the

people after the death of Dothan and Abiram)

⁴⁶ And Moses said unto Aaron, Take a censer, and put fire therein from off the altar, and put on incense, and go quickly unto the congregation, and make an atonement for them: for there is wrath gone out from the LORD; the plague is begun. ⁴⁷ And Aaron took as Moses commanded, and ran into the midst of the congregation; and, behold, the plague was begun among the people: and he put on incense, and made an atonement for the people. ⁴⁸ And he stood between the dead and the living; and the plague was stayed.

2. Although the pastor does not have this same function of standing between the people and the Lord as a mediator and intercessor, there is a function of standing as a voice for God to the people of God, as Moses and Aaron did. We do this by preaching the gospel of the substitutionary death of Christ and His resurrection, and teaching the Word of God as is commanded to be done.

The term “pastor” meaning “shepherd” shows this function of feeding and protecting. In order to do this, he must be a capable teacher, making the Word of God clear to the people of God.

Acts 20:28–31

²⁸ Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. ²⁹ For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. ³⁰ Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. ³¹ Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears.

1 Peter 5:1–4

¹ The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: ² Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; ³ Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. ⁴ And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.

Titus 1:5-9

⁵ For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee: ⁶ If any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly. ⁷ For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not selfwilled, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre; ⁸ But a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate; ⁹ Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers.

B. Compassionate in his actions – vs. 2

1. The high priest can deal gently with the ignorant and those that have gone astray because he himself is subject to weakness.
 - a) “Who can” – δύναμαι – has the power to – this points to the last clause of the verse – “for that he himself also is compassed with iniquity.” The reason he is able to be compassionate in his actions is because he knows the frailties and weaknesses of sinful man because he is one.
 - b) “Compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way”

- (1) “Compassion” – μετριοπαθέω (metrios, moderate; and pathos, passion) – this is the only time this word is used and is one that literally means to act with moderation. In its use here it carries the idea of moderating “one’s anger towards, to pardon, treat with mildness or meekness” (Zodhiates).

It means “to be moderate or tender in judgment toward another’s errors. It speaks of a state of feeling toward the ignorant and the erring which is neither too severe nor too tolerant. The high priest must be careful lest he become irritated at sin and ignorance. He must also take care that he does not become weakly indulgent.” (Wuest)

- (2) “On the ignorant” - ἀγνοέω – the alpha privative with νοέω, a word for the mind and its ability to perceive and understand.

In its use in this verse it means “to err, to commit a fault or faults arising from the want of discernment, knowledge, or insight, denoting conduct of which the result and importance is unperceived by the agent.”

Leviticus 4:13

¹³ And if the whole congregation of Israel sin through ignorance, and the thing be hid from the eyes of the assembly, and they have done somewhat against any of the commandments of the LORD concerning things which should not be done, and are guilty;

Leviticus 5:18

¹⁸ And he shall bring a ram without blemish out of the flock, with thy estimation, for a trespass offering, unto the priest: and the priest shall make an atonement for him concerning his ignorance wherein he erred and wist it not, and

it shall be forgiven him.

2 Peter 2:12 [speaking of the false teachers mentioned in vs. 1]

¹² But these, as natural brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed, speak evil of the things that they understand not; and shall utterly perish in their own corruption;

- (3) “Them that are out of the way” – all one word in the Greek – πλανῶ – those that have wandered astray from the truth. This isn’t speaking of a lost person as much as it is a believer who has been led astray.

Matthew 18:12–13

¹² How think ye? if a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray? ¹³ And if so be that he find it, verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth more of that sheep, than of the ninety and nine which went not astray.

1 Peter 2:25

²⁵ For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls.

2 Peter 2:15

¹⁵ Which have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness;

2. It isn’t hard to make the application of this verse to the New Testament shepherd/pastor.

- C. Empathetic in his leadership – vs. 3

1. The high priest must offer sacrifices for his own sins as well as for the sins of the people.
2. Having to recognize his sins first and make sacrifices for them before he was fit to offer for others shows that he could be, and should be, empathetic to the needs of others.
 - a) “And by reason hereof” – goes back to the last clause of the previous verse.
 - b) “He ought, as for the people, so also for himself, to offer for sins” – offering sacrifices was his primary purpose in his office and because he had to consider himself a sinner just like all the others, he was able to understand the ones coming for a covering for their sins.
3. This is the aspect of the high priest that has no comparison to the pastor today other than to acknowledge that we are sinners just like everyone else and as such we can also be empathetic to the burdens and temptations of others.

D. Humble in his service – vs. 4

1. The honor of being a high priest is a calling from God, not something one takes upon themselves, as exemplified by Aaron.
2. Applying this for today, leadership in spiritual matters, whether as pastors, teachers, or ministry leaders, should be seen as a calling from God, not a position sought for personal ambition. This verse encourages believers to discern and respond to God’s calling rather than pursuing roles for self-glorification.

3. Just as the high priest did not appoint himself, those in positions of authority should remember that their role is a gift and responsibility from God. This fosters humility and a reliance on Him rather than self-reliance.

[1 Timothy 1:12](#)

¹² And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry;

[1 Corinthians 9:16–17](#)

¹⁶ For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel! ¹⁷ For if I do this thing willingly, I have a reward: but if against my will, a dispensation of the gospel is committed unto me.

II. CHRIST AS THE ULTIMATE HIGH PRIEST – vs. 5-10

A. Divine Sonship and Priesthood – vs. 5-6

1. Vs. 5 – Christ did not glorify Himself to become High Priest; He was appointed by God, as foretold in Psalm 2:7.

[Psalm 2:6–7](#)

⁶ Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion. ⁷ I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee.

2. Vs. 6 – Christ's priesthood is eternal and of a different order, "according to the order of Melchizedek," as cited from Psalm 110:4.

[Psalm 110:4](#)

⁴ The LORD hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.

B. Suffering and obedience – vs. 7

1. During His earthly life, Jesus prayed with deep emotion and was heard due to His reverent submission to God's will. His suffering was integral to His role, as it equipped Him to understand human struggles fully.

Isaiah 53:3

³ He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

Isaiah 53:11

¹¹ He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities.

2. This is speaking in large part to the Garden of Gethsemane agony that Jesus endured, and then to the cross and the agony He suffered there. That said, we know that Jesus wept at other times during His earthly ministry because the Bible records at least one of those occasions at the graveside of Lazarus (Luke 11:35).

C. Source of eternal salvation – vs. 8-9

1. Vs. 8 – Although He was the Son of God, Christ learned obedience through His suffering, fully experiencing human trials.

Philippians 2:5–8

⁵ Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:
⁶ Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: ⁷ But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant,

and was made in the likeness of men:

⁸ And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

2. Vs. 9 – Having been perfected through His obedience and suffering, Christ became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey Him. This emphasizes that His experiences were essential for His priestly function.

- a) The phrase “being made perfect” is not in any way saying that He wasn’t perfect before this. The term used (Και τελειωθεις) is one that points to His finished and completed work: “and having finished it all – having died and risen again” (Clarke).
- b) The same word is translated “finished” in John 17:4 and shows to what this text refers.

[John 17:4](#)

⁴ I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do.

D. Eternal priesthood – vs. 10

God designated Christ as High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek, signifying a superior and eternal priesthood (as stated at the beginning, more on this later in our study).

Conclusion: Because of what Jesus did for us when He paid our sin debt and became our substitute to satisfy the requirements of the Levitical Law, we no longer need an earthly high priest to sacrifice on our behalf – the work is perfectly finished. As we found in our last study, because of this we can go boldly to the throne without any other mediator other than Christ, the Great

High Priest.

That said, because all Scripture is given by God and is profitable for us today, the teaching and ministry of the Old Testament high priest gives us a valuable illustration and example to follow for the pastoral leadership of the church today, as well as an example for all of us to follow as our own individual priesthood is carried out.

We all need to learn to be faithful in our calling, compassionate in our actions, empathetic in our leadership, and humble in our service, using the example of our Great High Priest to follow.