

# **Christ Is Superior to the Levitical Priesthood**

## **“Unskillful in the Word”**

### **Hebrews 5:11-14**

The first two words of verse eleven point back to Melchisedec in the previous verse. The author acknowledges the depth and complexity of what they are about to explain. The teaching about Jesus' priesthood and its connection to Melchisedec requires a level of spiritual maturity and attentiveness. This shows that some biblical truths are not immediately accessible and require effort and growth to fully understand.

The use of the first-person plural pronoun “we” in verse eleven brings an interesting thought. This likely refers to the author of the letter and his companions or fellow teachers. The author uses “we” to convey that the difficulty in explaining deeper theological concepts is a shared challenge among those who are teaching and guiding the early Christian community. Essentially, the “we” emphasizes collective responsibility and effort among the leaders and teachers of the faith to impart wisdom and understanding, and it also underscores their shared frustration at the spiritual sluggishness of the audience.

As I’ve stated before, I believe this letter was written to be read and taught to the churches that received it and was given so the Jews that were struggling with their faith – either as unregenerated seekers or new and immature believers. If that is the case, it is most likely the shepherd/pastors of those churches were included in the “we” as given here.

This text begins a lengthier portion that goes through chapter six and verse twenty. The teaching on Melchisedec picks up in chapter seven and verse one. This portion of Scripture is parenthetical, so to speak, and is a warning against apathy (lack of interest or concern) and apostasy.

These verses address the issue of spiritual apathy, highlighting

that the readers of the letter, as well as those listening to it being read and taught, are unskilled in understanding the Word for various reasons. This same issue persists today, as many in our churches remain biblically illiterate. Believers, whether they truly possess faith or merely profess it, often show little interest in being taught the Word of God. Instead, they seek places of worship that make them feel good about attending church without challenging them with the "deep things of God." As pastors and teachers, it is our responsibility to "declare unto you the whole counsel of God," no matter how challenging that may be or how well it is received.

What caused this apathy then and what causes it now? Why were they unskillful in the Word?

#### **I. BECAUSE THEY DIDN'T LISTEN TO WHAT WAS TAUGHT – VS. 11**

What they had to say about Melchisedec and Christ was going to be complicated and take time and would be difficult to interpret especially to those who don't really care to put the time and attention into the study.

- A. There was much to be given on the subject – "Many things to say."
  - 1. There was much that needed to be said, and would be said, about Melchisedec and how he related to Christ.
  - 2. There is much in the Bible that needs to be said, that needs to be taught, on many subjects. The problem is there isn't the desire to teach like there once was because there isn't the desire in the hearer to learn and follow.

This subject comes up again towards the end of this letter to the Hebrews – it's that important.

- B. It would be difficult for them to explain – “Hard to be uttered.”
1. The only time in the Bible this word for “hard” is used (δυσεμῆνευτος) is in this verse. It’s a compound word that literally interpreted means that it would be difficult to interpret.

The second part of the compound is transliterated in the English word “hermeneutics,” which is defined as the branch of knowledge that deals with interpretation, especially of the Bible or literary texts.

2. Bible interpretation is very important for every believer, not just the pastor/teacher. It is, however, essential and required that the pastor knows how to interpret the Bible correctly, and that takes work – a lifetime of work.

#### 2 Timothy 2:15

<sup>15</sup> Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

To “study” in this verse in 2 Timothy is to make every effort to do one’s best and endeavor to work hard to present (“shew”) ourselves to God as proven – that is, tested by trial and found to have stood the test.

We are to be a “workman” – toil, work, labor – that does not need to be ashamed before God because we have proven ourselves faithful to the work of interpreting the Word of God correctly and presenting it clearly – “rightly dividing the word of truth.”

3. According to the context of our text in Hebrews 5, the reason it would be difficult for them to explain or interpret was not because they didn't know what it meant, it was because those to whom this was written were not in a place of biblical maturity where they would understand it.
- C. Because they had demonstrated a slowness in understanding – “Seeing ye are dull of hearing.”
1. This isn't because they were not able to understand. They had shown at some point that they chose not to listen with the intent of learning.

Today, we might equate this with those that go to church and hear a preacher or teacher, but it has no affect on them because they didn't listen with the intent to learn.

**Proverbs 4:1–2**

<sup>1</sup> Hear, ye children, the instruction of a father, and attend to know understanding. <sup>2</sup> For I give you good doctrine, forsake ye not my law.

**Proverbs 5:1–2**

<sup>1</sup> My son, attend unto my wisdom, and bow thine ear to my understanding: <sup>2</sup> That thou mayest regard discretion, and that thy lips may keep knowledge.

2. This word for “dull” (νωθρός) is only found in the book of Hebrews – in this verse and in 6:12 where it is translated “slothful.” The opposite of this truth is found in verse 14.

The word “slothful” is an adjective form of the noun “sloth,” which means physical or mental inactivity. As it is used in Proverbs, it speaks of willful disregard for activity, not a physiological issue.

Proverbs 18:9

<sup>9</sup> He also that is slothful in his work is brother to him that is a great waster.

Proverbs 19:24

<sup>24</sup> A slothful man hideth his hand in his bosom, and will not so much as bring it to his mouth again.

Proverbs 24:30–34

<sup>30</sup> I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding; <sup>31</sup> And, lo, it was all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof, and the stone wall thereof was broken down. <sup>32</sup> Then I saw, and considered it well: I looked upon it, and received instruction. <sup>33</sup> Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: <sup>34</sup> So shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth; and thy want as an armed man.

**II. BECAUSE THEY DIDN'T LISTEN TO WHAT WAS TAUGHT, THEY DIDN'T LEARN – VS. 12-13**

A. There was a reasonable expectation – vs. 12a

“For when for the time” – by this time in their spiritual lives.

This phrase can be understood as, “considering the time which has elapsed since you were converted. You have been Christians long enough to be expected to understand such doctrines. This verse proves that those to whom he wrote were not recent converts” (Barnes).

B. There was an expected responsibility – vs. 12b

1. They should have grown significantly enough in their spiritual life to be teaching the things they were still wanting taught to them.

2. This isn't saying that all will be teachers, or that all have the gift of teaching. It's simply stating that by this time they should be past the basics and on to the deeper things of God and His Word.

C. There was a sad result – vs. 12c-13

1. The sad result is that they just didn't listen with any intent to learn and were still weak in their understanding and were like babies still only wanting milk.
2. The sad result today is the same all too often.

2 Timothy 4:1–5

<sup>1</sup> I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; <sup>2</sup> Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. <sup>3</sup> For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; <sup>4</sup> And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. <sup>5</sup> But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry.

3. “Unskillful in the word of righteousness”
  - a) The word for “unskillful” (ἀπειρος) is a compound with the alpha privative – without – and the word for “experience.” Literally, without experience.
  - b) “The word of righteousness” is referred to by John Wesley as “the sublimer truths of the gospel.” They were unskilled, inexperienced in teaching the truths about both the basics of Bible doctrine as well as the deeper things of Scripture. They should have been

able to do both by now.

### III. BECAUSE THEY WERE LAZY – VS. 14

This verse stands in contrast to the previous three, showing what the goal of the believer ought to be. The believers to whom this text was given chose to be content where they were.

#### A. Lazy in growing up – “full age”

They were too lazy to be bothered with anything that would take them out of their comfort zone – “strong meat.”

I had a big chunk of prime rib one night on the Rogue River in Oregon. When I finished it, I thought I would never have prime rib again. But you know, a day later I was ready for another piece! So, too, you might leave a Bible study, saying, “That was sure a long study,”—but if you’re walking, exercising, growing in the Lord, you’ll be back for more on Sunday, saying, “Serve it up again. I’m hungry!” (Jon Courson)

#### B. Lazy in exercising – “who by reason of use have their senses exercised”

##### 1. “By reason of use”

- a) This word for “use” (ἔξις) is only found in this verse in the Greek New Testament is one that we would think of in the word “habit.”
- b) Just as physical exercise needs to become a habit to be effective, so also do we need to exercise our minds by use of the Scriptures habitually.

## 2. “Have their senses exercised”

- a) “Senses” – again, the only time this word is used – in classical Greek, it was literally translated as the organs of the senses, or the organs of perception. In the context here, it speaks to the internal sense, the perception of the mind.
- b) “Exercised” (γυμνάζω) – where we get the English word “gymnasium.” In New Testament times, speaks of a place for exercising. Metaphorically, to train in godliness, and the place to train is under the tutelage of a Bible teacher.

### 1 Timothy 4:6–8

<sup>6</sup> If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine, whereunto thou hast attained. <sup>7</sup> But refuse profane and old wives’ fables, and exercise thyself rather unto godliness. <sup>8</sup> For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.

## C. Lazy in discernment – “to discern both good and evil”

1. This is not just speaking of knowing the difference between good and evil morally.
2. This is speaking, within the context of the Word of God, of discerning between wholesome and corrupt doctrine.

### Ephesians 4:12–14

<sup>12</sup> For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:

<sup>13</sup> Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto

the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:

<sup>14</sup> That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;

Conclusion: The writer of Hebrews, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, uses some very strong words and metaphors to emphasize the importance of believer's becoming skillful in the Word.

There are many other things that go into our spiritual growth and maturity along with the Word of God, but without a mature knowledge of the Bible those other things that are needed will be of little use to us.

Woven into this text in Hebrews 5 is the responsibility of sound biblical teaching from the pastor/teacher of a doctrinally sound church. Spiritual maturity is greatly enhanced if that principle is followed.

#### 2 Timothy 2:1-2

<sup>1</sup> Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

<sup>2</sup> And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.

Some changes are necessary: In his book *DON'T PARK HERE*, C. William Fisher tells about driving in his car with his four-year-old son at his side. "Byron, what do you want to be when you grow up to be a man?" he asked.

The youngster replied, "I don't want to grow up to be a man."

Surprised, his father asked why not. "Because," said Bryon, "then I couldn't ride my tricycle!"

Fisher wrote, "As I drove on, I thought, 'I'm sure that I enjoyed my tricycle when I was four, but I'm also sure that I enjoy much more the

power and performance of my [modern vehicle] today." Many Christians cling to "their religious tricycles" when they should be enjoying the surge of power and effectiveness of [a modern vehicle] relationship.

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