

1. My title for this lesson is, "How does one become a mature Christian". The more I thought about that title, the more it bothered me. How does one know when one is a mature believer? Do we sin less? Are we able to pass a test on specific doctrines about Christianity? Are we in trouble as believers if we are not mature? Does this mean we can't tell jokes in church? If the bible and in particular Hebrews Chapter 5, calls us to be mature believers, how do we do that?
  - a) First, let me state that maturity is not a magic line that one crosses. I have read a bunch of commentators on this concept, and I believe it comes down to knowing about right and wrong. By the last verse in this chapter, one can verify that concept to be correct. A mature Christian is one who knows that "this" thing is or is not a sinful act to be avoided. This "thing" can also be whatever God calls us to do right now. To put it another way, Christian maturity is about our willingness to listen to God at any moment of our life. It is not a goal to learn more, but a willingness to trust Him to lead us.
  - b) Let me give a simple example. Last night, my young daughter asked me to pray with her, as she was really scared about something. After we prayed I told her that she still has to work hard on her school related issue. I also told her the result of that issue is now God's problem. Our willingness to trust Him through our problems is a sign of maturity.
  - c) Know the topic of "maturity" will run through the next two chapters. If we are going to understand Jesus as our representative before God the Father, we have to be able to trust Him to guide our lives. Our willingness to trust Jesus is the key to spiritual maturity.
2. With that little speech out of my system, let me now switch gears and talk a little bit about the topic of priests. Ever major religion and even every major cult has a system of priests. Each group may have a different title for that job, but essentially they all have the same function: To help people with their lives and help them draw closer to whatever god they represent.
  - a) The original Jewish recipients of this letter were no exception. Over a thousand years before Jesus came on the scene, Jewish people offered sacrifices for their sins and other sacrifices out of gratitude for what God did in their lives. God Himself called on a specific group of Jewish people to be priests, whether that group liked it or not. My point is these Jewish believers already had a system of priests in place long before Jesus came around.
  - b) Now the writer of Hebrews wants to convince that group, that Jesus who was not part of that specific group of Israelites called to be priests, is not only a priest, but is superior to that group of priests. That would be a tough sell to them given that specific background.
    - i) What this chapter is teaching in effect, is part of the concept of Christian maturity is about understanding why trusting in Jesus is superior to the thousand year old system (at that time) that Jewish people have followed for the forgiveness of sins.
  - c) OK let's assume most of us are not Jewish. Why should we care about this? I also assume the vast majority of people reading this lesson, are already devout Christians. Other than potentially arguing with a Jewish person over which religion is superior, why should I care about any of this stuff? The issue comes back to maturity as a Christian. The issue is about our willingness to trust God to guide us at any moment of our lives and our ability to understand why having Jesus as our high priest is a necessary for that maturity.
  - d) Let me put it this way: My goal in this lesson is not to make you an expert on the Old Testament style of worship so we can understand that Jesus is superior to that system. My goal is to help all of us be more mature believers in Jesus. In effect, Christianity is all about trusting God to guide our lives. It is about trusting that Jesus is our representative before God the Father. It is about trusting that God is guiding our lives through whatever issues we are facing at the present moment.
  - e) Given that goal, let us learn about the Old Testament priesthood with the goal of finishing this lesson trusting Jesus all the more to guide our lives so we become mature believers.

3. Hebrews Chapter 5, Verse 1: Every high priest is selected from among men and is appointed to represent them in matters related to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins.
  - a) I stated in the introduction that the Jewish priests were a specific group of people that were to be priests among the rest of the Jewish people to help them draw close to God.
  - b) It is important at this point to understand how the Jewish priests were chosen. Let me give an illustration: Suppose there was a man named the "United States" who had fifty sons. Each son and his wife then moved to a specific territory allotted to them. Therefore there was a child named California and another named Alabama, etc. Everyone who then lived in California were direct descendants of "California" or whatever state one picks. That is in effect how the original tribe of Israelites first divided up the land of Israel.
    - i) To finish this illustration, now suppose God says, "All the residents of "Florida" are to be priests to the descendants of the other states. In fact, descendants of the man named "Florida" will not have their own physical state, but they must be scattered throughout the rest of the country."
    - ii) That in "Jewish speak" is the tribe of Levi, who were to be the priests. If one was a descendant of Levi, one was required to be a priest. Let's say you were born in another tribe, but one really wanted to be a priest. Your parents would say, "too bad, you are going into the family camel business because you are not a Levite." Another person who was born in the tribe of Levi, might think, "I don't care for this serving God stuff, I want to go sell camels. His parents would say, "too bad, because you were born a Levite so it is off to seminary you go." ☺
      - a) The whole point of this illustration is to show that that the system of priests as set up in the Old Testament was designed was a requirement for Jewish people of specific descendants to go be the priests.
    - iii) One should also know that when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem in 70AD, all of the family records were destroyed. When one meets a Jewish rabbi (priest) today, what tribe they are from is a non-issue. Today, anyone of Jewish faith can study and become a rabbi and that system of priests by race is no longer in place.
  - c) OK hopefully by now, one understands how God set up priests in the days prior to Jesus. Now, tell me what these priests did, and then tell me why I should care.
    - i) The main function of these priests was to offer gifts and sacrifices. All off the Israelites were supposed to bring animals to be sacrificed for the forgiveness of their sins and other sacrifices were made to show gratitude to God for their lives.
    - ii) If you think about it, the whole process seems strange. Why would the God who created everything require His people to regularly offer up animals for their sins?
      - a) One key reason is to show that sin is "painful". By taking innocent animals (the animals used were never meat-eaters) and killing them, the picture is to show how much pain is caused by sin in our lives.
      - b) So if God ordained this system for a thousand years prior to Jesus, why is it that Christians don't offer animals for our sins? The answer is that this whole process was in effect a model of what Jesus did. The idea is that since God literally offered up Himself for our sins on the cross, those animal sacrifices are no longer needed for the forgiveness of sins.
      - c) Do religious Jewish people today still offer animals? The answer is no. The Romans destroyed their main temple roughly 30 years after Jesus was resurrected. Roughly at that point in history they changed their system to just confessing one's sins and no longer offered animals for their sins.
    - iii) OK, so you are telling me this whole system of sacrifices were designed to be a model leading up to Jesus complete payment for our sins. As Christians most of us know that. Why is that significant? The point is this chapter is going to show how Jesus is superior to this system of priests. Let me explain in Verse 2.

4. Verse 2: He is able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and are going astray, since he himself is subject to weakness.<sup>3</sup> This is why he has to offer sacrifices for his own sins, as well as for the sins of the people.
- a) The main point here is to understand that the everyone in this entire group of Jewish priests were imperfect people like you and me. God required that they offer sacrifices for their own sins on a regular basis before they could offer up sacrifices for the sins of others.
    - i) If one has a background in Roman Catholicism or any other church group with a large body of priests, one can understand this better. To give an example from my own life, my mother's cousin was a bishop in the Roman Catholic Church. He lived in Croatia. I only met him a few times when he came to visit his American relatives. My point is when he came to visit it was a really big deal in the heavily Catholic populated town I grew up in. There were big dinners in his honor at the local church when he came to town. My point is devout Roman Catholics hold their priests and their bosses in high esteem. Many Catholics see their priests as being someone who is superior to themselves because they are "closer" to God.
    - ii) I share that story because even though people tend to regard priests as someone who is better than they are (i.e., closer to God). God in effect says to those Jewish priests in the Old Testament, you are still human like everyone else and you have to deal with your own sins before you can be of help to anyone else.
  - b) It might be helpful at this point to remember the key difference between a priest and prophet: A prophet is someone with a message from God to be delivered to people. In effect all the writers of the bible were prophets because they were delivering what God wants us to know about Him through His word.
    - i) On the other hand a priest is someone who leads other people to God.
    - ii) The key difference between a prophet and a priest has to do with the direction of the message being delivered. A prophet delivers a message from God to us. A priest delivers a message from us to God.
  - c) With that said, let me come back to the basic and key question: Why do we need a priest between God and ourselves? Why can't we just pray directly to God the Father? Why the necessity of a priest in between God and ourselves?
    - i) Let me start with "human priests". Many people don't know what they are supposed to do to please God. A priest helps with that function. That is why priests (or those with similar titles) lead church services as well as help people learn how to draw close to God. That was the function of the "Levites" among the Israelites and that is the function of "priests" within the Christian church.
    - ii) Getting back to the issue of prayer, we can pray directly to God the Father. Priests (and teachers) help us to know how to pray. We are more than welcome to come directly to God the Father with our prayer requests because the complete price of our sins have already been paid.
    - iii) OK John, I know all of that. ☺ Why the necessity of Jesus as a "priest" in-between God the Father and ourselves? It is so that we can know for sure that because God became a human, that Jesus can relate to us as fellow humans and understand our weaknesses before Him.
  - d) Now let's come back to these two verses. What the writer of Hebrews is building a case for is the concept that the Jewish priests were imperfect humans like all other people. At the same time, Jesus as a priest is superior to this system because Jesus did not have to offer sacrifices on His own behalf because He did never sinned.
    - i) How do we know Jesus never sinned? For starters, none is recorded in the bible. If there was any evidence of Jesus sinning, don't you think Jewish leaders would point out that evidence? The only sin they tried to convict Jesus of, was that He claimed to be God. It is not a sin in that the evidence shows it to be true.

- e) OK John, if we believe Jesus is God why do we still need priests today?
  - i) First, let me state for the last time here that one can substitute the word pastors or teachers for the word "priests" here. It is the concept, and not the title that I am focusing on at this point in the lesson when I say "priests".
  - ii) With that said, if Jesus is our high priest in heaven, why have a structure of priests on earth? The answer is so that we can help each other draw closer to God.
  - iii) It does not mean all Christians are called to go in the professional ministry. I do believe that all Christians are called to be in the full time ministry. Our mission field may be our place of work or raising our children. I'm just saying that there is a need for the professional ministry to help people draw close to God. At the same time, all Christians can pray directly to God the Father, because God the Son has paid the price for our sins and understands our weakness as humans.
- 5. Verse 4: No one takes this honor upon himself; he must be called by God, just as Aaron was.
  - a) We finish this short discussion of Jewish priests with the reminder that at the time this book was written, the system of Jewish priests was still determined by one's ancestors. Remember my silly illustration how all descendants of "Florida" were the priests to the descendants of the residents of the other states. In other words, when God set up the Jewish priesthood, one cannot choose to be a priest, one has to be born into that role.
  - b) Why did God set it up that way? Why couldn't any Jew be a priest if that Jewish person felt called by God to be a priest? Why did they have to be a descendant of a certain tribe?
    - i) The answer is to show us how God "calls" us to be priests. One cannot willfully just choose to go into the ministry. One has to be first called by God.
    - ii) OK John, I'll bite. ☺ How does one know if one is called by God? Does He speak audibly to us when we are called to go into some specific ministry? The best answer I can give is one cannot stand to do anything else if one is called into full time ministry work. To quote pastor Alistair Begg, "If you can do anything else, do it. If the thought of doing anything else other than going in the professional ministry bothers you, then God is calling you or me into that specific ministry."
    - iii) Another way one will know for sure is I find that once one chooses that path, doors open up for us to guide us down that path. I know of people who didn't have the money to go to a bible college and all of a sudden, the funds just showed up so that person could in effect quit what they are doing to be a "priest".
  - c) Since there are only 14 verses in this lesson, let me take a moment, go back to Verse 4 and explain who was Aaron and why God picked Him to be the first Jewish High Priest.
    - i) If you don't know, Aaron was the older brother of Moses. The bible records sins committed by Aaron, the worst of which is that he led the Israelites in a rebellion against God when Moses left to spend time alone with God.
    - ii) My question is why did God pick this guy? Was it as a favor to Moses? After all, God could have picked anyone of Jewish decent to be the first high priest. Why was Aaron chosen? I don't have a great answer, but I suspect it was to show that despite all of Aaron's faults and sins, God is willing to pick people with faults and weaknesses like us in order to be priests to others.
    - iii) Let me put it another way: Do you feel you are not qualified to make a difference for Jesus in this world? If you think that, compare your life to Aaron's. Here was a man that committed some pretty bad sins, and God still made him the first high priest of the nation of Israel. My point being is if God is willing to work with Aaron, despite all of his faults and shortcomings, then He is more than willing to work with you and me despite all of our own shortcomings in life.
    - iv) As I was taught, God is not looking for ability, but availability. Once we make ourselves available for God, He takes "what is there" and even provides us with what we need in order to get His will done.

6. Verse 5: So Christ also did not take upon himself the glory of becoming a high priest. But God said to him, "You are my Son; today I have become your Father.
- a) For those who have been with me through the book of Hebrews so far, you know by now that it is not possible to get through a lesson of Hebrews without quoting the book of Psalms at least once, if not more often, and this chapter is no exception. Here in Verse 5, we get a quote from Psalm 2, Verse 7. From the quote mark in the middle of the verse to the end of the verse is a direct quote of that psalm reference. For my new readers, know that the book of Hebrews gives a lot of Old Testament quotes simply because the original intended audience of this letter did believe the Old Testament was the word of God.
  - b) Now that I've gotten that statement out of my system, let me talk about what this verse means and why Psalm 2 is quoted at this point. The short version is that just as God called one specific tribe of the Israelites to be the priests, so God the Father called Jesus to be the high priest on behalf of men as predicted in Psalm 2. To understand this concept a little better, let me explain what God did not choose to do:
    - i) For example, why didn't God send an angel to die on our behalf? After all, angels function as His messengers between Himself and us. The answer is that that our high priest needed to know what it was like to be human and feel the struggles of being a human in order for us to relate to God the Father.
    - ii) So why didn't God pick another human for a return trip? In other words, why didn't God say to Adam, or Moses or someone else, "Go suffer and die for the sins of all people, but don't worry as I will resurrect you." The answer is "fairness". Another person may have been willing to do this, but if God is perfectly loving and perfectly just at the same time, only God Himself could pay the price for our sins. That act shows how He could be fully just (that is making Himself pay the full price for our sins that we deserve) and at the same time be fully loving by He Himself showing how much He loves us by that act.
    - iii) This leads me back to the verse. The point is God the Father said in effect to God the Son only You can do this. That is why God the Father declared to Jesus, "You are my son" as predicted in the psalms many centuries before Jesus was born.
  - c) Let me pose another question, if there is only "One God", how can He have a son? This is the reason why most Jewish people, as well as most Muslims reject the idea that Jesus is the Son of God. People struggle with the idea of God being "more than one". How is it possible for God to be human and "separate Himself" as a human from being fully God?
    - i) Part of the answer is that if we know that God became human, we can know that He understands our lives and we can relate to Him. I once heard it explained this way: A man watched a bird accidentally fly into his house and couldn't get out. The man tried and tried to let the bird out, but the bird didn't get it. Finally the man figured that the only way he could communicate that he was trying to help this scared bird, was to become a bird himself and tell the bird how much he loved the bird and was trying to help that bird go to safety.
    - ii) In effect, that is why God put Himself in what He created. Do I fully understand how God could become a human? Of course not. I just accept the necessity of this process in order to show us how much He loves us, and share with us how we can go to safety and live forever.
  - d) To summarize this verse, the main point the writer is trying to get across is that the idea of Jesus is God and He came into the world to die for our sins was predicted many centuries before the event actually occurred. Yes it is a difficult concept to grasp. Yes, many people struggle with this concept and won't accept Jesus as God because that concept seems illogical to the minds of many people. At the same time, billions of Christians like you and me know and accept this to be true and trust in Jesus to guide our lives.
  - e) I have more to say on this concept, but let me move on, and I'll comment as I go.

7. Verse 6: And he says in another place, "You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek."
- a) Yes, we have another quote of the psalms here in Verse 6. This is from Psalm 110, Verse 4. Before I explain this quote, it is important to state again that Jesus was not of the lineage of the Old Testament priests. Remember my silly illustration that only a descendant of Florida can be the priests to the descendants of people from other states? Along a similar way of thinking, a specific group of Jewish people were called to be priests to all of the other Israelites. My point is that Jesus, through Mary and Joseph were a descendant of a different tribe of Israelites than the ones called to be priests.
  - b) The point being that a Jewish Christian still may struggle with the idea of Jesus as a priest as He was not a descendant of Levi. The way God got around that issue is to say in effect, there is another priest described in the Old Testament and Jesus is a priest the same way this other person is a priest. That other person is named Melchizedek.
  - c) Before I explain who Melchizedek was, let me quickly explain why this is important if I one is not from a Jewish background. Yes we understand the point is to show that God has ordained priests outside of the tribe of Levi in the bible. Still, why is this significant?
    - i) It comes back to the necessity of understanding why we need Jesus not only as a complete payment of all the sins we commit (past, present and future), but also as someone who intercedes for us between God the Father and ourselves.
  - d) With that said, let me now take a few moments and explain who was Melchizedek and why this issue is relevant to understanding Jesus as our high priest.
    - i) Melchizedek was the king of Jerusalem (that's what kings were in those days) as well as a priest when Abraham was alive. Remember that Abraham lived many centuries before the first Jewish High Priest (Aaron) was ever born.
    - ii) In Genesis, Chapter 14, there is a story of Abraham being involved in war between one group of cities fighting against another group of cities. Abraham side won that war. After that war was over, there is a strange story of Abraham giving 10% (that is what a "tithe" is) of what Abraham won in that war to Melchizedek.
    - iii) The interesting thing is we don't even know for sure that Melchizedek was the ringleader of the kings that went to war. We just know that he was the king and top priest of Jerusalem. Remember that the Israelites did not conquer that city until many centuries after this event. Here is Abraham, giving a tithe to just him.
    - iv) Again remember that Melchizedek was both a king and a priest. That is important because in Jewish thought, kings and priests are always separate offices. Yet here was Abraham, the "father of the Jewish people" giving a tithe to this one person.
    - v) Another point to remember is that Melchizedek would only be remembered as a trivial bible character mentioned in few verses in Genesis, if it was not for the fact that many, many centuries later, King David made a reference to Him in the psalms. That reference leads us back to this verse here in Hebrews Chapter 5. In that psalm verse that is quoted here in Hebrews, we learn Jesus will be a priest forever, not based on the Levite system of priests, but based on Melchizedek.
    - vi) What the writer is trying to do is show that Jesus, who was not a Levite, was ordained by God to be a top priest, not based on the Levitical priesthood but based on what Melchizedek was many centuries before the Levite priesthood began.
  - e) OK John, you got me. ☺ I understand that there is a biblical history to show that Jesus was ordained to be a high priest, long before the Jewish system of priests were set in place. That leads to the tougher question: Why should we care? Why is it important to us that Jesus was ordained to be a priest and was predicted in the Old Testament?
    - i) It is so we know that God ordained Jesus since at least the "early days" of Genesis to be our high priest and most likely, long before that. Just as Abraham honored this king and priest entity, so we should honor Jesus as our own king and priest.
    - ii) With that said, we can move on to the next verse.

8. Verse 7: During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission.
- a) When I think about this verse, it makes me wonder more about Jesus. What I mean is, if Jesus is God, what did He have to learn in His life on earth? If Jesus knew He was going to die for the sins of mankind, why pray for the event? What were the prayer requests that He brought to God the Father, and why did He even cry about this event in the first place as stated in this verse and in the Gospels? OK, time for some speculation:
- i) Visualize Jesus as a newborn baby. Did He come into this world already knowing everything? Yes Mary probably explained the predictions she got about Him as He grew up, but as a child, did Jesus have full knowledge that He was God? We don't know, but somehow I don't suspect Jesus as a young child grasped the full picture yet. What I do suspect is that He eventually understood His role and destiny. Jesus depended upon God the Father to teach Him what He needed to know at any given moment in time while He was on the earth.
  - ii) I suspect that God the Father wanted to teach Jesus what temptation was all about. God the Father wanted to show us through Jesus' life that it is possible to resist sinful temptation by trusting Him to guide our lives. Is it easy? No. Is it possible? Yes. The point is the difficulty of dealing with temptation is what required Jesus to submit to God the Father in tears.
  - iii) Let me explain further: I believe Jesus is God, but while He was on earth, I don't believe He had complete knowledge of all things as say a young child. What about when He was baptized? Did He know all things about the world at that point? Again we don't know. One can drive oneself crazy trying to comprehend how if "Jesus is God, why did He have to do this or that thing, if He already knew all things". All one can do is accept the New Testament as written and focus on what God called us to focus upon, which is our relationship with Him.
  - iv) The way I look at it is, I have a hard enough time worrying about what God wants me to do with my life, then to try to comprehend things that were not meant for me to comprehend. For example, I can't read someone else's mind and tell you what that person is thinking, or know everything that other person knows. I just make the best decisions possible with the information at hand. In other words, I don't worry about what Jesus did know or didn't know at any given moment in time. All I can do is make the best decisions possible based on what is presented.
  - v) With that said, what is presented is the fact that Jesus did pray to God the Father "so hard", He prayed with tears. Visualize someone begging another person to change their mind about a decision. That is the type of "so hard" I visualize here.
- b) At this point, let me try to tackle the verse a different way. I believe the point is that Jesus was asking God the Father "Is it really necessary for me to die on the cross". I believe that Jesus understood He was going to be resurrected. Avoiding physical pain was not so much the issue as it was He being separated from God the Father. Jesus had grown to be so dependant upon the guidance of God the Father, that fear of separation scared Him.
- i) The related question is in effect, "Is there any other way for people to be saved other than me (Jesus) dying on the cross?" Was this really necessary? Can't people be saved by being a good person or by being happy? As believing Christians most of us already know the answer, but it is worth stating here: The problem with any other salvation standard is that we never know for sure if we are good enough for God. If we try to approach God the Father based on our own standards of right and wrong, we will never know if our lives were good enough to please Him.
  - ii) The bottom line is that Jesus agreed to this plan, although He didn't want to have to face the pain of being separated from God the Father at all.

- c) OK John, I sort of know all of this stuff. Why should I care? The answer gets us back to the title of my lesson: How we achieve maturity as a Christian. It is not by trying harder to do the right thing, but to realize and remember that God is in charge of our lives and that because Jesus submitted His will to God the Father, we too, can have eternal life by our willingness to constantly and regularly turn over our will to God the Father. Further, we have Jesus at God's side to help through the difficult times of our lives.
9. Verse 8: Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered <sup>9</sup> and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him <sup>10</sup> and was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek.
- a) Verses 8 through 10 appear to be one long sentence. I hold the view that the unnamed author of this book was Paul, if for no other reason, his long and complicated style of writing sentences seems to fit the style of the Book of Hebrews.
  - b) Let me come back to the issue of how much did Jesus know when He was here. Verse 8 teaches that He learned obedience from what he suffered on earth. That statement alone teaches us that Jesus did not know all things during that specific time frame, but then is when He had to learn obedience to God the Father's will.
    - i) Let me ask this question: How do we learn obedience to God? Do we just read about in the bible and do as told? Whether we like it not, we tend to learn best from our mistakes. If one wonders why God allows so many bad things to happen in our lives, think about the lessons we learn, or at the least think about how we end up submitting to God the Father's will for our lives because of those trials.
    - ii) I believe that by Jesus suffering, He learned what is submission to God the Father. The point for us is that Jesus can relate to whatever we go through in life. It is not because He experienced the exact same things that we experience. It is because He learned and understand that the only solution to working one's way through life's problems requires submission to the will of God the Father, so we must too, learn that submission. Submitting is kind of like my prayer with my daughter. It is not about avoiding what we have to do, but accepting God's results.
    - iii) In summary the reason Jesus is our "high priest" before God the Father is so that we know that someone who was human can relate to our problems and relate to our need to submit to God the Father in order to deal with our issues.
  - c) This three-verse sentence ends with another reference to Melchizedek. The writer of Hebrews is making the point again that Jesus is a priest not because He was from the tribe of Levi, but that He was appointed by God to be the priest the same way Melchizedek was appointed by God to be a priest that Abraham personally submitted to.
    - i) Does this mean that Melchizedek was an Old Testament appearance of Jesus? Some scholars make that argument, but the truth is, no one knows. Even some religious Jews argue that Melchizedek is a "type" of the Messiah (eternal king) to come, as they see him as someone that Abraham honored with a tithe and then centuries later David said in effect that "you are a king forever like Melchizedek".
    - ii) So why bring up Melchizedek here at this point? Yes it is to remind the Jewish audience that Jesus was designated to be a priest and the prediction of that role was stated as far back as the book of Genesis. The point for you and me is to understand that God the Father designed from the beginning the entire plan not only of Jesus dying for our sins, but that also Jesus was to have the eternal role of being our representative (i.e., "top priest") before God the Father.
    - iii) The idea is for us to grasp the concept that Jesus can relate to whatever it is we have to face in life because He Himself understood what it was like to be tested and tempted. Because Jesus did not sin, we too can have the power to overcome our own weaknesses by trusting in His power to deal with our issues. That trust in Him, is the type of maturity the author wants us to comprehend.



10. Verse 11: We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn.
- a) The problem the original audience who received this letter had was that they were too afraid to trust in Jesus out of fear of persecution or simply out of fear of how they were going to be treated in their society. One of the hardest things to deal with in life is when one's friends and family shun us because we refuse to act like them.
    - i) What those Jewish Christians were doing was going back to their old life of Jewish style of worship, and trusting in those priest's rituals. On a related note, I have wondered why it is that so many churches are very crowded when all they do is perform rituals from start to finish. That is because people get comfortable in those rituals and they don't have to think about God very much. They can just watch the weekly "show" and then go back to their lives.
    - ii) In other words, many people think, "I'll go to church to get the guilt out of my system, but I really don't want God to guide my life. I want Him to protect me, but I don't want to submit to His will all the time. I want to rely upon my rituals and not have to trust Him daily for my life." That quote in effect is what the writer of Hebrews meant by "slow to learn".
  - b) Let me ask a different question about this verse, if the writer of Hebrews had a lot to say about this, why did he hesitate? Why not just say "You need to trust God daily to guide your lives?" Why insult them by saying in effect "You are slow to learn"? Truthfully, it is because many people don't want to hear about submission. They just want the rituals.
    - i) I want to explain this another way: One concept that has bothered me is when Jesus made the statement "But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it." (Matthew 7:14, NIV). If Jesus were speaking God's truth, wouldn't He be aware that one day billions of people would accept Him as the Son of God? How could only a "few" find this truth as stated in Matthew 7:14?
      - a) Was Jesus just talking about those Jewish people at that time, or is there something more to that statement? What occurred to me is the "few" is based on the fact that only a specific percentage of Christians (only God the Father knows that percentage) trusts Him to guide their lives.
    - ii) In other words, not all people who claim to be Christians truly trust God to guide their lives daily. That is what I believe Jesus meant by that statement. That is also what the writer of Hebrews meant when he said that many are slow to learn.
    - iii) John, are you saying that if I go to a church that has a lot of rituals that I am going to the wrong church? No. The issue is not the church, but the attitude of our heart in our relationship to Jesus. Are we trusting in those rituals for our salvation or are we trusting in God to guide our lives. That is what "maturity" is. It is about discerning the right thing to do in any situation by letting God guide our lives as opposing to just trust in our own ability to work our way through any situation. God does not expect perfection from us. He just wants us to trust Him to guide us through our lives. Christian maturity is about discerning what we should do in any given situation and trust in God to guide us through those situations.
      - a) I know that reads like a "greeting card", but learning dependence upon God to guide our lives, is the point the writer is getting at.
      - b) This is going to become important when we get into Chapter 6 in the next lesson, which many scholars consider the most difficult chapter in the bible to teach. The secret of reading chapter 6 is to remember that the topic of the moment is the maturity of the believer. The chapter does not teach one can lose one's salvation, but it does continue the topic of maturity.
      - c) Let me put it this way: If you are still confused about the topic of how to be a mature Christian, hang in there, the next lesson continues this topic and explains how it is we are to be mature believers.

11. Verse 12: In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food!
- a) To understand this verse, ask what is the key difference between "milk and solid food"?
    - i) Think of milk as something an animal or a nursing mother has already eaten and now that food is being digested again for someone else to eat.
    - ii) Think of the "food" reference to food that has never been eaten before and think of the milk reference to food that in effect has already been eaten one time.
  - b) OK John, I get the reference. What does it mean? It means that the original audience reading the book of Hebrews was going back to their Jewish rituals and were not trusting in God to guide their lives. The writer is saying, I can't just say to you "Trust God to guide your lives", because you are busy trusting in your old way of living again. The mistake being made is that they are trusting in their rituals and not God's guidance.
  - c) I need to state at this point, that Verse 12 has meant a lot to me in starting this ministry. Many years ago, I spent a lot of years just learning the bible. God showed me one day, this verse and the reference to "by this time you ought to be teachers". What He meant was that it was time for me to stop "just" learning and it was time for me to teach others. Did I know as much about the bible then as I do today? Of course not. Have I stopped learning? Of course not. It was just at that moment, that I realized that God was saying to me you are ready to start teaching. In other words, I was not a bible scholar at that point, but I did grasp the concept of being dependant upon Him, and because I did grasp that concept God felt it was time for me to be a teacher.
    - i) So, given that, when is it time for me to be a teacher of the bible? It is not based on how much of an expert one is on the bible. It is not even based on one's physical ability to be a great teacher. It is based on one's ability to be willing to trust God to guide one's life. Once one does that and one is still willing to learn, one can teach others' the truth that is God's word.
    - ii) How do I know if I am called to be a teacher? That is easy. Are others willing to listen to what you have to say about God's word? It never ceases to amaze me to watch people who in effect don't care about my life show interest when I speak about what God's word teaches. The growth of this ministry is one simple proof that teaching God's word is never a waste of time.
    - iii) Let me share one of my favorite prayers on this topic: Dear God, teach me what You want me to learn today and teach me what it is You want me to share with others". I find that God can't resist when we are willing to submit to Him and even more so, willing to share what He wants us to learn with others.
  - d) OK, time to stop talking about my life and get back to the text. The point here is that many people reading Hebrews couldn't stand the idea of having to learn to trust God moment by moment to guide their lives. Such people, have to be once again taught the basics that Jesus is God, He did die for our sins, He is our High Priest and we do have to trust Him to guide our lives. It is amazing to watch people who are more concerned about their rituals and their own lives then in trusting God to daily guide them.
    - i) To state it another way, people would rather say to God in effect, "I don't need Your help in this or that area of my life. I want to do it my way." That failure to trust in God's guidance is what requires people to need "spiritual milk" as opposed to the "solid food" that is learning God's word daily.
  - e) Let me end with a point about what church one should go to: Is the church one attends teaching Gods word and is not shy about teaching the entire the bible? If one is attending a church like that, one is in a good church. If one is attending a church where the pastor is more interested in just performing rituals or discussing the latest book he or she has read, then one is not being feed "solid meat" that is in effect the Word of God. OK, on that convicting thought, let us finish this chapter.

12. Verse 13: Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness.<sup>14</sup> But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.
- a) The writer is saying milk is a good thing for a baby or an infant. If a grown man or woman is still drinking out of a baby bottle, let's just end that thought there.
  - b) Let me focus on the phrase "teaching about righteousness". What does that mean?
    - i) First, the concept of righteousness gets into the idea of "right standing" before God the Father. What is "right", comes back to the concept of trusting Him to guide our lives. Let me put it this way, remember how I was discussing the concept that Jesus said only a "few" make it into heaven? It means that one can grasp the idea that Jesus is God and He died for our sins, but still not get saved. Why that is so, is again because of many peoples refusal to trust Him to guide their lives.
    - ii) OK John supposed I am having a bad day. Suppose I normally trust God to guide my life, but today or this week or this month, I am dealing with some sin issue. Does that mean I am not saved? Hardly. If you recall back from Chapter 3, the writer of Hebrews refers to the readers as "Holy Brothers". My point I believe the writer of the book of Hebrews believes that audience was saved. I believe that means one cannot lose one's salvation if one is trusting in God to guide our lives.
    - iii) Remember I said that Chapter 6 is considered the most difficult chapter in the New Testament to teach people? That is because that chapter deals with the topic of the danger of "falling away" from Jesus and what that danger brings. With that said, I don't believe one can lose one's salvation if one is trusting God to guide one's life. Yes one can and does make mistakes, but if we truly believe Jesus died for our sins and truly believe He desires to guide our lives, a true believer will eventually turn back to Him, and that is the point here.
    - iv) All of that leads me back to "righteousness". The point is we are in right-standing before God because we believe that Jesus did die for all of our sins, past, present and future. At the same time, one is also in right-standing before God because we do trust Him to guide our lives. Even if and when we fail to do that, we can get back in right-standing by confessing what we did was wrong and simply believing that His way for guiding our lives is what He desires us to do.
  - c) All of this leads to Verse 14. That verse says "solid food is for the mature. Back when I started this lesson, a question I pondered is what does the bible mean by mature? Does it mean we only sin "x" times per day? Does it mean we know are bible well enough to pass a specific test? Well, that is not what the bible says. The book of Hebrews literally defines what maturity is, here in Verse 14: It is the ability to distinguish good from evil.
    - i) Now wait a minute, can't a nonbeliever distinguish good from evil? Can't any person know for example that stealing and murder is wrong? How can you or the bible say that in order to be able to distinguish good from evil, we have to eat "solid food". To answer, first, let us remember what is "solid food". It represents a regular and steady diet of studying God's word and how it applies to our lives.
    - ii) Next the bible helps us to know right from wrong by literally making us feel guilty when we are doing the wrong thing. Let me put it this way, those who don't care about pleasing God may feel guilty about say stealing, but they suppress that guilt. Those who desire to please God with their lives, will feel that guilt and because we want to please Him, we desire to confess and turn from that action.
    - iii) But again, a devout Muslim or a devout Jew would also have that same feeling of "this is right and this wrong". The problem is that they refuse to grasp the idea of having Jesus pay the complete price for their sins as well as feel the guilt that comes from not trusting God to guide their lives.

- d) To put it all together, the mature believer (which is what the "solid food" reference means) is all about, understands the necessity of God Himself paying the complete price of our sins as well as the concept of the necessity of desiring God to guide our lives for His glory.
  - i) If one can grasp those concepts, one is a mature believer. Again, it is not about how many bible verses we know by heart, or by how much sin we turn from, but by our trust in Jesus as being both fully human and fully God who is our complete payment for our sins and by our trust in God the Father to guide our lives daily.
  - ii) If one gets all of that one is a mature believer. The rest, as they say is the details.
- 13. Let me at this point close in prayer. Heavenly Father, Our thanks that You provide for us "solid food", which is Your word, so that we can be mature believers. Help us not to trust in our own abilities or our own rituals to try to please You, but simply to trust You to guide our lives. Help us to remember that You are guiding us when we are willing to trust in that guidance. Help us to live our lives to make a difference for You in all that we do. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.