

# Christ in Hebrews

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## **Listen to Jesus! (Hebrews 1:1-2)**

I remember a seminary professor speaking against the red letter versions of the Bible. The red letter bibles put the words of Jesus in red while the rest is in the normal black. It emphasizes the importance of what Jesus said. The professor argued that the whole bible is inspired by God and each word and phrase is as important as all the others. Red letters making parts of the Bible more important than the rest is heresy. I'm not completely convinced of that anymore. It seems to me that there are reasons to see Jesus' words as being more important than others in the Bible for a couple reasons. Maybe "more important" isn't correct, but I began to think about this when I started my study of the book of Hebrews. I'm thinking that even the author, whoever that might be, agrees that we should pay more attention to Jesus and give priority to him and his teachings. Isn't that how the book begins?

It says, "Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son." The book of Hebrews begins by telling us that Jesus is greater than all the prophets that have come before him. I'm sure that the writer is referring to the prophets of the Old Testament. This 1<sup>st</sup> section about Jesus and the Prophets ends with verse 4 where it transitions to the second section of the book which explains how Jesus is greater than all the angels. It explains the difference between being the "son" and being a messenger of God to minister to believers. That's what the angels are. The third section of Hebrews, beginning with chapter 3, explains how Jesus is so much greater than Moses.

The two ways that mankind heard from God after the fall was predominantly through angels and prophets. He would occasionally put these communications in dreams and/or visions. The prophets would have the angelic visitation and then communicate the message to the people. That's not the way we hear from God anymore! That may sound like heresy to those who insist that there are modern prophets that hear directly from God, but this is what I'm reading from the first verse in the first chapter of a Book that's all about the superiority of Jesus over everything else. I'm not saying the rest of the bible isn't important. It is because as Jesus himself said, it's all about Him. On the road to Emmaus he explained how all the passages from all parts of the Bible, the Law, Prophets, and the writings were all about him. We should seek to find Jesus in the whole Bible. God, Himself, even exhorts us, "And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, 'This is my Son, my Chosen One; listen to him!'" (Luke 9:35)

## **Jesus Speaks for God! (Hebrews 1:2-3)**

Martin Luther tells a story about being up late studying the scriptures when he had a vision of Christ standing before him in all his radiant glory! After studying the vision with great interest Luther concluded that the Jesus of the Bible would not appear in such a way today. He was convinced that this visitation was a delusion or possibly a demonic apparition designed to distract him from the teachings of Jesus as recorded in the bible. He spoke to the vision and said something like, "The Christ of the Bible is sufficient for me." After that, the visage vanished. The man who coined the phrase, "sola scriptura" stood by his conviction of the sufficiency of

the Christ as recorded in the Bible. God speaks to us today, in these times, as the author of the book of Hebrews says, "Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son." Luther was convinced that Jesus alone, as revealed in the Bible alone, is sufficient for him. It is for me too! He didn't need an angel or any other supernatural visitation to confirm for him the truths of the Bible and the reality of the sufficiency of Christ. God's greatest communication to Luther and to all mankind came from God's Son who gave himself for us.

The author of Hebrews goes on to explain why Jesus and the message from God that he brings is the most important. The passage continues "but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power..."

In a very real sense, when Jesus speaks, God speaks. He doesn't say, "thus saith the Lord..." as the Prophets do. He simply says it. My former seminary professor, Stanley Toussaint used to say, "if God has spoken, there is nothing more important than to listen to him. Let me say that again. If God has spoken, there is nothing more important than to listen to what he says." God speaks to us all in Christ and through Christ. There is nothing more important than what he has to say. Jesus, Himself, made it clear that His words were God's words. John 8:28 gives us Christ's testimony. It says, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me."

### **Hear Jesus, Hear God! (Hebrews 1:2-4)**

I did not make up the idea that Jesus is the subject of the entire Bible. I got that from Jesus himself. In John 5, Jesus is confronting the religious leaders who claim to be disciples of Moses because they know he came from God. But they don't know about this Jesus. The Religious leaders of Jesus day claimed to put Moses' teachings as the cornerstone of their faith. They lean on Moses and the rest of the Old Testament as the most important thing in life. Jesus points this out to them in John 5:39. He says as translated by the Amplified Bible, "You search and investigate and pore over the Scriptures diligently, because you suppose and trust that you have eternal life through them." Jesus isn't correcting their assumption of being able to find "eternal life" in the Bible. The Scriptures do point us in the way of Eternal Life!

He's telling them that their focus when reading and studying the Bible is misdirected. In the very next verse, John 5:40, he adds, "And these [very Scriptures] testify about Me!" He is affirming the reality of eternal life being found in the scriptures in that the whole of scripture is about Him who is the "heir of all things, through whom also God created the world. Jesus is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and Jesus upholds the universe by the word of his power." This is the Good News directly from God who "so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son so that anyone who believes in Him will not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

The religious leaders, scribes and Pharisees of Jesus day were reading the scriptures to understand the prerequisites of earning God's acceptance and inheriting eternal life. They were looking for either loopholes in the law that might excuse them from perfect obedience or they were writing lists of things to do and not do to win God's favor. That's all they could see in the

Bible and that was all they were interested in. I'm afraid there are still some Pharisees, scribes and religious leaders today who still focus on the wrong thing and mislead many into believing that they can earn or deserve God's acceptance by trying harder or doing more. Jesus says to them and to us in the next verse, John 5:40, "And still you are not willing [but refuse] to come to Me, so that you might have life." A literal rendering of John 1:5 from the Good News Bible says this about Jesus, "The Word was the source of life, and this life brought light to humanity." If God has spoken, and Jesus is the Spokesman, there is nothing more important than to listen to what He has to say.

### **Hear Jesus and receive Eternal life (Hebrews 1:2-4)**

The Religious leaders, Scribes and Pharisees had a tradition of understanding God's message to man in the Scriptures to be about personal behavior. They seemed to miss the fact that every generation before them failed in being faithful to God. From Adam and Eve through the days of Noah, the tower of Babel and onward through the desert exodus even through the period of the Judges and then the united and the divided Kingdoms there was nothing but failure in living up to God's righteous standard for life. Yet the focus of these religious people remained on being better, trying harder and doing good. Even the greatest of their Hero's was a gross failure in his own personal life becoming both an adulterer and murderer not to mention his family failures. They continue to pick out episodes of His life as the example for everyone to follow ignoring the fact of his gross sins. This is still done today from church pulpits expounding on topics like "standing up to giants" in life like David did or being faithful like all the Judges, etc. The point of those passages in the Bible is not that they were good and we need to follow their example. The point is they were all sinners and needed a savior!

The Religious leaders were searching for eternal life in the Scriptures and Jesus informed them that, Yes, it was there because the Scriptures are all about Himself. But Jesus advised them that there will be a witness to testify against them when they fail to acquire "eternal life." "It won't be me," Jesus says, "but the very one you are trusting in." John 5:45-46 gives us Jesus words to the Religious leaders of his day. They want to "lay burdens" on the back of normal people that are way too heavy for them to bear. They want to enforce the law even to the point of stoning adulteresses in spite of their own sinfulness. They want a standard by which to live up to in order to deserve God's favor. But Jesus says, "Yet it isn't I who will accuse you before the Father. Moses will accuse you! Yes, Moses, in whom you put your hopes. If you really believed Moses, you would believe me, because he wrote about me."

Stop focusing on being better, trying harder or doing more! The Scriptures are not about keeping the law. They are about our failure to be able to keep the law and our need for a savior to stand up to our enemy for us and wipe out our sin. This is what the author of Hebrews is talking about when speaks of Jesus being the most important thing. It's about who He is and what He has done for us. Hebrews 1:2-4 concludes, "but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. **After making purification for sins**, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs." Let me put the important phrase in red!

### **Listen to Jesus, Not Angels! (Hebrews 1:4)**

Hebrews 1:4 ends with a transition from Jesus being far better than the Prophets to Jesus being far better than the angels. It says that Jesus sat down next to the Father in heaven after having made atonement for our sins and “having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.” Names and titles were nearly the same things in the day the author penned this idea. The writers of the UBS handbook for translators acknowledge this when they comment, “In this type of context *greater* must be understood in the sense of “more important,” or “of higher rank,” or “of greater authority.” They go on to elaborate: “In a number of languages one must distinguish clearly between a personal name which identifies an individual, and a title indicating rank. In this context the emphasis is upon the title which was given to Jesus.”<sup>1</sup>

The first part of this Epistle explains that God used to speak through the Prophets but today He speaks to us through His Son. Jesus’ message to us is superior to the message of the Prophets that foretold Him and His life. Jesus message is so important because that’s what Moses and the prophets spoke about and Jesus is the fulfillment. So Jesus is more important, or greater than the Prophets. Many Jews believed that the OT, especially the Law of Moses, was delivered to Moses through Angels. So when the writer of Hebrews turns his attention to Jesus’ superiority to the Angels he does so to give even further credence to Jesus’ and his teachings. This was important because in the early Church people were drawn to angel worship at times. Paul warns against that in Colossians 2:18 he writes “Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels.” Then again we read in Galatians 1:8, “But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed.”

What the author of Hebrews is doing in this Epistle is saying pretty much what God said to those at Jesus’ transfiguration as recorded in mark 9:7, “And a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud, ‘This is my beloved Son; listen to him.’” I’m arguing that God doesn’t speak to us through prophets anymore! Anyone claiming the gift of prophecy is on shaky ground biblically. God doesn’t speak to us through angels today which would have been a good thing to acknowledge when Joseph Smith met the angel Moroni. Jesus is the message of the whole Bible from beginning to end. True preaching is about Jesus; who he is, what he’s done and what he says. Pay attention to him, Listen to him!

### **The Message is in the Music(Hebrews 1:5f)**

The writer of Hebrews knows his Old Testament well and uses passages from it to prove the superiority of Christ and His message to us and the world. In verse 5 he begins a commentary on Psalm 2:7 (ideas repeated by the way in 2 Samuel 7:14). He chooses verses that deal with Jesus’ superiority to angels. In verse 5 he writes, “For to which of the angels did God ever say, ‘You are my Son, today I have begotten you?’ Or again, ‘I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son?’” It is not surprising to me that the quotes the writer uses in the first chapter of Hebrews are all from their songs. Kistemaker acknowledges this in his commentary; He gives the source of every quote: “indeed in his first chapter he avails himself of five passages from the Psalms and one from the Hymn of Moses (Deut. 32). The quotations are from Psalm 2:7 and 2

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Ellingworth and Eugene Albert Nida, [\*A Handbook on the Letter to the Hebrews\*](#), UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1994), 13.

Samuel 7:14 in verse 5; Deuteronomy 32:43 (according to the readings in the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Septuagint) in verse 6; Psalm 104:4 in verse 7; Psalm 45:6–7 in verses 8–9; Psalm 102:25–27 in verses 10–12; and Psalm 110:1 in verse 13.<sup>2</sup>

The writer of Hebrews wants us to grasp the reality of how the Old Testament is truly about Jesus! Everyone recognizes Psalm 2 as a song about Jesus or in the case of the Jews about the Messiah. Again, let me lean on a much better scholar than I, to explain this truth. Kistemaker says, “The Jewish people understood Psalm 2 to be messianic, and their use of the psalm in the synagogue reflected that understanding. The individual writers of the New Testament also interpreted messianically all the quotations and references from the second psalm. For example, when Paul preached in Pisidian Antioch, he said, ‘What God promised our fathers he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus. As it is written in the second Psalm: You are my Son; today I have become your Father’ (Acts 13:32–33). Quotations from Psalm 2 are given in Acts 4:25–26; 13:33; Hebrews 1:5; 5:5; Revelation 2:26–27; 19:15. Allusions to verses 2, 7, 8, and 9 can be discerned in Matthew, Mark, Luke, Acts, Hebrews, II Peter, and Revelation.”<sup>3</sup>

Visiting many churches over the years and having attended hundreds of chapel services as well, I’m often moved by how the music contains better theology than the messages. Whereas the messages seem to stray from the person and work of Jesus into the need for submission, obedience and commitment on the part of the listeners. We’re frequently to try harder, give more, serve more, study more, read more, do more, etc. etc. etc... But the music nearly always remains faithful to the message contained in the person and the work of Jesus. Pay attention to that yourself sometime. The messages sound much more like that which the Pharisees and religious leaders of Jesus day might preach and not what the writer of Hebrews is preaching about.

### **Worship Jesus, worship God(Hebrews 1:5-6)**

Jesus is far superior to angels. Jesus is the only begotten “Son” of God and thus the heir of all things. Angels are simply “messengers” who were both created by Jesus and sent in service to Him. Verse 5 says, “For to which of the angels did God ever say, You are my Son, today I have begotten you? Or again, I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son”? These two Old Testament quotes serve nicely as a pair that supports the Old Testament teaching that Jesus fulfills the requirements as “heir” according to Psalm 2 because he’s first born of God and has the priority in the family of God. The second quote from the Davidic Covenant in 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel explains the permanent role of the heir to the throne of David. David wants to build a house for God and informs the prophet Nathan accordingly. Nathan agrees at first then hears from God (as was the custom in times past) and bring David’s God message. “You won’t build a house for me,” God says, “But I will build a house for you.” It’s not about what you do for me. It’s about what I do for you.

Jesus was not “a” son as the angels were referred to collectively. He was “The Son” of the Old Testament messianic prophecies. Jesus is not “a” son in the same sense that Christians are as they are collectively called in the New Testament. Jesus is “The” son and the fulfillment of all

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<sup>2</sup> Simon J. Kistemaker and William Hendriksen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, vol. 15, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953–2001), 35–36.

<sup>3</sup> Simon J. Kistemaker and William Hendriksen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, vol. 15, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953–2001), 36.

the Old Testament from the first mention of the child to be born of a woman in Genesis 3 throughout all the Old Testament prophets and writings. Thus, he both was the most important message from God and He proclaims the most important message from God. That's why God opened the heavens and spoke Himself as recorded in Mark 9:7, "This is my beloved Son, Listen to Him." Jesus is the actual physical manifestation of God! When we hear from Jesus, we hear from God. That's why we worship Jesus.

The angels did too! Verse 6 contrasts Jesus with the angels. It's sometime easier to understand something and to communicate it when you contrast it with something rather than compare it with something. The writer of Hebrews, wants us to see the weakness of one and the strength of the other. That's why he quotes the Old Testament in which God says, "And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says, 'Let all God's angels worship him.'" He is not only the heir of all things in contrast to the angels; He's worshipped by the angels. This is the most frequently recorded activity of angels. They worship God. Check out the following verses: Job 38:7; Psalm 103:20; Isaiah 6:1–3; Revelation 4:8; 5:9–12. I like what Hughes said in his commentary here; "Angels (unless they are fallen angels) do not worship other angels, for that would be angelolatry! The only one they can and do worship is God. Our job is to lift up Jesus!<sup>4</sup> Jesus must have the priority! The Old Testament is all about Jesus and the New Testament is all about Jesus. Keep Jesus at the center of it all. It's all about keeping our eyes and thoughts on Jesus! When we look at the wind and the waves around us and take our focus from Him that we begin to sink.

### **Worthy is the Lamb (Hebrews 1:7-8)**

In continuing his contrast of Jesus with angels the author of Hebrews writes, "Of the angels he says, 'He makes his angels winds, and his ministers a flame of fire.' But of the Son he says, 'Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom.'"

Of the three elements; earth, wind and fire, the author uses the last two of them to describe the work of angels. This is not unusual in the Old Testament. Daniel says, "I saw in my vision by night, and behold, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the great sea." (Daniel 7:2) Dwight Pentecost comments on this verse and says, "**In his vision Daniel first saw the great sea** churned by the action of **four winds**. The word translated 'winds' may also be rendered 'spirits,' that is, angels. Elsewhere in Scripture this word is used to refer to God's providential actions in the affairs of men through angels (Jer. 23:19; 49:36; 51:1; Zech. 6:1–6; 7:14; Rev. 7:1–3)."<sup>5</sup> In Genesis 19, Angels were sent to Sodom and Gomorrah. They destroyed those two cities and the surrounding area with "flames of fire" out of the sky! Angels are nothing more than messengers that God uses to intercede in the affairs of men. They are simply sent forth for certain tasks to accomplish and they obey.

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<sup>4</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Hebrews: An Anchor for the Soul*, vol. 1, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1993), 38.

<sup>5</sup> J. Dwight Pentecost, "[Daniel](#)," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 1350.

Jesus on the other hand is the one who sends them. He is “God forever and ever.” The authority of His scepter is over all creation including the angels. He commands and they obey. Angels are simply messengers of God. It’s interesting that both the Greek and the Hebrew word for angel means “messenger.” We refer to Jesus as the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. This comes from Paul’s letter to Timothy when he closes the first letter (1 Timothy 6:15). He describes Jesus as, “he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords.” Again we see it in Revelation 19:16, “On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.” He sits on the throne and wields the scepter. He directs all the affairs of the angels from his position and they obey. Their tasks are temporary, but Jesus reign is “forever and ever.” I believe John is telling us what the angels do when their missions are finished. He writes in Revelation 5:11-12, “Then I looked, and I heard around the throne... the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, ‘Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!’” He deserves our focus now and will have it forever and ever. We should say “worthy is the Lamb who was slain.”

### **The Righteousness of Christ (Hebrews 1:9)**

The whole Bible is about Jesus and why we should give more attention to Him than to anything or anyone else. The author of Hebrews wants his readers to get that truth. To those who want to elevate angels, prophets and even Moses to the prominent position in life, the author uses their own scriptures to show that it is improper to do so. In the Gospels God opens the heavens and tells us “This is my beloved Son, listen to Him.” But the Old Testament carries the same message. It is clear that no one and nothing should have precedence over Jesus. Hebrews 1:9 continues the quote from the Psalms and reads, “You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions.”

Concerning this verse, the handbook for translators says, “This whole quotation, in its present context, is a favorable judgment given by God the Father on the total life and work of his Son.”<sup>6</sup> In the Psalms and in the Prophets and in the Law God bears witness to the Son and his perfection and right to reign. None of the prophets are presented to us as perfectly righteous in every way. Even the most prominent heroes have flaws and weaknesses that lead them into sin. According to both the Old Testament and the New, we’ve all fallen short and have sinned. There is no one righteous. Wait a minute, there is one! His name is Jesus!

“It is not a kingdom at all in the ordinary sense of the word. There are no plush palaces, no visible royal regalia, no elaborate political negotiations with other kingdoms. Yet in some special way he rules in the hearts of his people more thoroughly than any earthly king rules his subjects. He rules with righteousness. He loves righteousness.”<sup>7</sup> He shares his righteousness with those who trust in Him. Joy is always connected to righteousness in the Bible and that was the pronouncement that came from an angel to the shepherds around Bethlehem. Luke 2:10 says the

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<sup>6</sup> Paul Ellingworth and Eugene Albert Nida, *A Handbook on the Letter to the Hebrews*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1994), 19.

<sup>7</sup> James Girdwood and Peter Verkruse, *Hebrews*, The College Press NIV Commentary (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1997), Heb 1:9.

angel declared to the frightened shepherds, “And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.” The “Good News” that brings “Great Joy” to “All People” (including you and me) is that Christ’s righteousness can be ours through faith not through works. The Good News (Romans 1:16-17) is “Joyful News.” It’s the news that even sinful man can be made right with God through faith in Jesus. It’s His righteousness not ours that saves!

### **Jesus is Supreme over Everything (Hebrews 1:10-12)**

Almost every commentator observes the fact that the author of Hebrews speaks of the superiority of Christ over the prophets. His arguments are around the need to give Jesus supremacy over God’s earlier spokesmen. He adds the same is necessary regarding the angels. Jesus reigns supreme over them. He’ll next talk about, in a little more detail, how Jesus is supreme over Moses and then specifically address the law and its sacrificial system. But I haven’t noticed any commentator pointing to the fact that Jesus is supreme over the whole creation! God has been banned from the classroom as secular teachers force evolutionary theory down the throats of our children. They want to teach science as if it’s something apart from God or that it can in some way be divorced from its designer and creator. The author of Hebrews says that it’s better to know a little bit about Jesus than everything about the world! Hebrews 1:10-12 says “And, ‘You, Lord, laid the foundation of the earth in the beginning, and the heavens are the work of your hands; they will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment, like a robe you will roll them up, like a garment they will be changed. But you are the same, and your years will have no end.’” John and Paul aren’t the only two New Testament writers that attribute the creation of the world to Jesus.

You can never really understand the natural world and order of things until you understand Jesus! Everything you and I can learn about science, math, the arts, the languages, etc., is nonsense if it doesn’t illuminate the reality of its creator. Jesus was the first philosopher! Jesus was the first painter, writer, sculptor! As the physical manifestation of God’s love for mankind without a grasp of that knowledge is meaningless. God, through His Son (the expression of His love) gave us everything. He made the world and filled it with color and gave me eyes! God loves me! He made the world and filled it with birds and sounds of the night and gave me ears to enjoy them and the music of life. God loves me! He filled the world with foods of every imaginable variety and gave me the most sophisticated taste system so that I could every every single one of them. God loves me. I could go on and on!

The world and its vastness and glory grip us with its magnitude! One of the headlines this morning (June 20, 2019) says, “Nearby star may be supporting life! This may be the most earth-like exoplanet discovered yet.” I truly doubt that there’s life there, but we’re still looking to the stars! How can you look at them and not consider their origin! To do so, is a waste of time! The declare the greatness of God, Jesus! But in today’s America knowledge is god! Although He is the creator, choreographer, and sustainer of it all, we want to look at the macro and the micro worlds as something in and of themselves! This author wants us to understand knowledge in and of itself will not save us; not even knowledge of the Bible! Only Jesus can save us! He is not

only greater than the prophets, angels, Moses and the law. He is greater than anything. Think about that.

### **Look for Jesus! (Hebrews 1:13-14)**

After exploding with the glorious truths about Jesus being the founder, choreographer and sustainer of the whole universe, the author will now go back and wrap up his discussion about the angels. In Hebrews 1:13-14, He writes, “And to which of the angels has he ever said, ‘Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet’? Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?” No one sees the created order of the universe and all the galaxies and all the molecules and atoms as clearly as the angels do. What do they do? They worship Jesus! The Old Testament proclaims this everywhere but nowhere more beautifully than in the Messianic Psalms of David. In Psalm 103:20-22 we read, “Bless the LORD, O you his angels, you mighty ones who do his word, obeying the voice of his word! Bless the LORD, all his hosts, his ministers, who do his will! Bless the LORD, all his works, in all places of his dominion. Bless the LORD, O my soul!”

You see the Prophets acknowledge the superiority of Jesus! The Angels acknowledge and proclaim it! The whole earth stands as a miracle wrought at the hands of Jesus. The skies and the universe declare Jesus superiority! Jesus is the subject of the whole Bible. The author of Hebrews is pointing that out to his readers who are struggling over the role of religion in their lives. Is it the Law that needs emphasized? Is it the words of condemnation and judgement of the Prophets that should be proclaimed to scare the world into submission? Is it the accumulation of knowledge in the world of sowing and reaping that we should worship. Should understanding social dynamics be elevated above the worship of Jesus? The Bible is not about me and how good I am or how good I can or cannot be! The Bible is not a self-help book designed to give you good relationships and promotions on the job although there is much truth in them regarding such things. The Bible is about Jesus! Any ministry that gives prophecy, good works or knowledge a stronger focus is not focusing on what matters most! It’s all about Jesus!

We should evaluate every book we read, every song we sing, every sermon we hear on the basis of this truth. Is it about Jesus or is it about me or something else! Look for Jesus!

### **Drifting away from Jesus (Hebrews 2:1)**

After discussing at great lengths the importance of Jesus, His person and work, the author of Hebrews begins chapter 2 with a connection with what he’s already said in the first chapter. He’s demonstrating that Jesus is superior to prophets, to angels and to all creation. Well, what should that mean to us? Hebrews 2:1 begins, “Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it.” What does it mean to pay “closer attention”? The BKC on Hebrews says, “The truth he had just enunciated has important implications. The **therefore** shows that this admonition arose directly from the preceding material. Since the Son is

so supremely great and is destined for final triumph over His enemies, the readers would do well to **pay more careful attention** to these realities.”<sup>8</sup>

What is the content of “what we have heard”? It’s got to be the good news about Jesus Christ. The message that was spread by Paul and the other apostles! It’s the good news about the appearance of the Messiah of the Old Testament in the person of Jesus of Nazareth (who made purification for our sins (Hebrews 1:3)). Our focus should be on Jesus. Even the Old Testament prophets spoke about Jesus. Focus our attention on that. The Angels are all about Jesus. We should learn about Jesus from the conduct and activity of the Angels. The whole world was created, choreographed and is being sustained by Jesus. It’s all about Jesus. The God of love is revealed to us through all creation and all the records of the law and the prophets. Ultimately, His love for all mankind is fully demonstrated on Calvary. Romans 5:8, says, “But God demonstrated His love for us in this; while we were yet sinner Christ died for us.” God’s love for us should get our more diligent attention.

Why should we keep our focus on Jesus? Because everything around us tries to distract us! Like Peter walking on the water. As long as he had his eyes on Jesus he was fine. But when he took his eyes off of Jesus and put them on the situation around him; the waves and the wind, he began to sink. The Handbook for Translators says about this phrase “drift away”, “In secular Greek it is sometimes used to describe a ship drifting away.” It quotes Barkley who says, “Otherwise, we may well be like a ship which drifts past the harbour to shipwreck.”<sup>9</sup> In religious circles it’s often easy to lose our focus on the gospel and the person of Jesus! Instead of focusing on Him, we look to religious rituals, regulations and disciplines to save us. It’s not that we deny the truth of Christ, but we live as if it doesn’t matter! We are more concerned about what we do than what He did for us. Paul was disturbed by the Galatians who had drifted away from Jesus and slipped back into a life of religious obligations and observations. Some were preaching good works instead of faith in Jesus, as the basis for life. It’s in this passage that Paul brings up angels. He says, “But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed.” Don’t drift into a focus on good works rather than on Jesus.

### **The Law Only Condemns! (Hebrews 2:2-3a)**

The author of Hebrews is still talking about angels in Chapter 2. In Chapter 1 he clearly laid out the case for the superiority of Jesus to all the angels in that they simply do His bidding and when they’re not, they are worshipping Him. But now the role that angels filled in the past is compared to their role regarding Jesus. The Jews believed that angels played a role in delivery the Law to Moses at Sinai. The Jewish Priest and historian, Josephus, makes this clear when he says, “We have learned the noblest of our doctrines and the holiest of our laws from the angels sent by God” (see *Antiquities* XV:136, or XV,5:3 in Whiston’s translation). Stephen includes this fact in his sermon before being stoned to death. In Acts 7:53 he says, “...who have received the Law by the disposition of angels and have not kept it.” The most interesting thing in Stephen’s quote is the fact that the law ministered through angels was not kept. This affirms the truths of the Old Testament regarding Israel’s failure under their own law.

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<sup>8</sup> Zane C. Hodges, “[Hebrews](#),” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 783.

<sup>9</sup> Paul Ellingworth and Eugene Albert Nida, *A Handbook on the Letter to the Hebrews*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1994), 27.

Hebrews 2:2-3a says, “For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?” Failure to keep Moses’ law resulted in the destruction of Israel, both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms. In concluding the law in its second giving (Deuteronomy) there are curses and blessings: Blessings for keeping the law and curses when violating the law. This is sowing and reaping. “Don’t be deceived,” Paul tells the Galatians, “God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap.” The law establishes firmly the principles of sowing and reaping. We all live under that law and we’ve all sowed seeds to the flesh. Even our righteous deeds are not good in God’s eyes. Isaiah tells us that even “our righteousness is as filthy rags.” The ESV puts it this way Isaiah 64:6 “We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment.”

The author is saying “under the law, you cannot escape your judgment.” It is very reliable and every failure will have its consequences. But Jesus offers to pay the consequences for our sins! Yes, we made our bed but Jesus slept in it for us! It’s God’s pure demonstration of His love for us! “While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” If you ignore, diminish, demean, or dismiss this truth in favor of works righteousness there is no remedy for your sin! As Hebrews 1:3 says, Jesus “made purification for our sins.” Focus on the law, works, my own righteousness and my own efforts will bring no peace. There is no rest in the law! But Jesus calls us out of the law to Himself. “Come to me,” He says, “and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28).

### **God’s Law or God’s Love? (Hebrews 2:3b-4)**

We are in the same boat as the author of the book of Hebrews. He was not around when Jesus proclaimed the good news and died on the cross to seal the fate of all believers! Whoever wrote this book is relying on the testimony of the original hearers! He tells us, in Hebrews 2:3b-4, “It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.”

It was Jesus, Himself, that declared salvation. God used to speak to man through His prophets, but not anymore! It wasn’t prophets or angels who mediated God’s final word to man, it was the Son Himself. The importance of Jesus’ message in comparison to the mediated message of angels and prophets is like comparing the beginning of a story with its conclusion. The whole Old Testament is about God’s love for mankind. But Jesus gives us God’s final word regarding his disposition toward us. Again, I must quote, Romans 5:8, “But God demonstrated his own love for us in this. While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” From the creation account in Genesis 1 through the end of Malachi, God expressed His love for mankind in many different ways! But in Christ God “demonstrated” that love in an undeniable way! Jesus is both the messenger of God and the message of God! How does the Bible end? With Jesus!

Those who heard the message first hand attests to its validity. John is referring to the Apostles when he begins his first Epistle. He writes in 1 John 1:1, “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life...” He’s expressing the validity of the testimony of the Apostles about the message of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

Furthermore their message has been validated by God with many signs and wonders. Allen helps us understand this validation. He writes, “The confirming testimony of God via the miracles was given to those who heard the Lord, not to the author and his readers.”<sup>10</sup> If God was still performing these signs and wonders at the time of this writing the author would surely have referred to them as evidence of the authenticity of the Gospel. If we focus on the continuation of these signs and wonders we miss the point. The beginning of the story of redemption in Exodus was validated by miracles. The ultimate conclusion of the story of redemption is also validated by miracles and confirmed by reliable witnesses. Prophets and angels did not have the final word. Only Jesus did! Do we focus on God’s law or do we focus on God’s love? As Hughes says, “It is more blameworthy to sin against love than against Law, to ignore God’s mercy than to break his Law.”<sup>11</sup>

### **Jesus: A Man among Men! (Hebrews 2:5-8)**

Up to these verses, Hebrews 2:5f, the writer has been focusing on the deity of Jesus and how his superiority to the prophets and to the angels should drive us to “think more carefully” about Him. We should fix our attention on Jesus because there is so much for us to see and understand about His person and His work. The deeper we sink our roots into Jesus and his sacrifice on our behalf the stronger will be our branches in life. Paul prays that the Ephesians would do just that in Ephesians 3:17-19, he explains that Jesus is God’s love demonstrated to us in the flesh. He wants them to sink their roots into that so “...that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.” Growth in the spiritual life comes, not from trying harder, but sinking our roots into God’s love as expressed on Calvary. There is so much nourishment to be drawn from the person and work of Christ.

The author of Hebrews gives us more wonderful truths about the person and work of Jesus to which we should pay close attention. He moves on in these verses to talk about Jesus’ humanity. He writes in Hebrews 2:5-8, “For it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking. It has been testified somewhere, ‘What is man that you are mindful of him, or the son of man, that you care for him? You made him for a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned him with glory and honor, putting everything in subjection under his feet.’” The title “Son of man” was Jesus’ favorite designation of himself. It’s the focus on his humanity as foretold in Genesis 3:16 that he would come into the world as the seed of the woman. The Psalm that is quoted here is normally taken to refer to mankind in general because in Genesis God gave dominion over all creation to us! But we gave it away. Hagner observes, “Jesus is the true embodiment of humanity, the last Adam who realizes in himself that glory and dominion that the first Adam and his children lost because of sin. In him the words of the psalmist have their fulfillment. If the words were meant originally to apply to human beings,

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<sup>10</sup> David L. Allen, [Hebrews](#), The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2010), 198.

<sup>11</sup> R. Kent Hughes, [Hebrews: An Anchor for the Soul](#), vol. 1, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1993), 52.

they find their fullest realization in the one who is preeminently human, who reveals humanity as humanity was meant to be.”<sup>12</sup>

Jesus was not like the angels because he was fully human. He knows what we know. He feels what we feel, his is not, as the author tells us later in his letter in Hebrews 4:15 “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.” We must sink our roots down deep into God’s love as expressed in Christ. His divine position in eternity past as creator of all things was set aside because He loved us. He took upon Himself the nature of a man, being born of a woman, and experienced the pain and sufferings of death because He loved us. As a man without sin He restores to us the dominion God had planned for us over all creation. Here is where we should focus our attention! These are the things we should be thinking carefully about. Only in Christ will we find peace and rest with God and dominion over the world. The law brings nothing but condemnation.

### **By The Grace of God (Hebrews 2:7-9)**

Jesus set aside the glory that was His in eternity past when he took on the nature of a man. During His time on earth as a man, Jesus was somehow reduced to a status below the angels just as sinful humanity was lessor than the angels. But Jesus was sinless and represented the second Adam who was the person that God originally designed us all to be. Even in the flesh, Jesus exercised dominion over angels, both good and fallen. He controlled the seas! He controlled sicknesses and even had dominion over death. As Hebrews 2:7-9 says, God left nothing outside of Jesus control: “You made him for a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned him with glory and honor, putting everything in subjection under his feet. Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control. At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him. But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.”

As it was mentioned in the first chapter, Jesus is now at the highest place in Glory at the right hand of the Father waiting the day when God will put all His enemies under his feet. He exercised dominion over all things while on earth but His own people rejected His kingdom according to plan so that you and I might share in the His glory. Paul writes in Philippians 3:20-21, “But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.” Through His death, He paved the way for our redemption from the consequences of our sin and opened the gates of heaven for us all through faith alone: “not of works, lest any man should boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9).

We should pay closer attention to Jesus than to the angels because He died for our sins. They didn’t and they couldn’t. As Brown points out, “Death was the terrifying problem of the ancient world and if Jesus was to be really and truly ‘like his brethren’ (2:17), he had to go through its grim experience. The angels could not feel these pangs of human desolation. Death was

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<sup>12</sup> Donald A. Hagner, [\*Hebrews\*](#), Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 45.

unknown to them.”<sup>13</sup> Please note that Jesus’ death was “by the Grace of God.” This is how one commentary describes this: “The grace of God is equivalent to the love of God (by analogy to Rom. 5:15; 2 Cor. 8:9; Gal. 2:20–21; Eph. 1:7; 2:5, 8; Titus 2:11; 3:7). In the words of John Calvin, ‘The cause of redemption was the infinite love of God towards us, through which it was that he spared not even his own son.’”<sup>14</sup> Again, sinking our roots into God’s love for us as expressed on Calvary is what will change our lives, not trying harder!

### **The Source of Holiness! (Hebrews 2:10-11a)**

Think carefully about Jesus’ work on our behalf. Christ, the perfect human, took upon himself the consequences of our sin and suffered in our stead. The Old Testament contained this prophecy hundreds of years before Christ was born. Isaiah 53:5 says, “But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.” Jesus’ absolute perfection was demonstrated completely through his suffering on our behalf. Sanctify means to make something holy. Jesus sacrifice for our sins is the basis for our holiness. Apart from that there is no holiness. All our own righteous deeds are as polluted garments. They have no “holiness” in and of themselves. Christ is the one who makes us holy. There is only one source of holiness! It’s Jesus’ holiness not our own.

This is another reason why Jesus and His work on our behalf make him more important than the angels or the prophets. The author says in Hebrews 2:10-11a, “For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering. For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source.” The holiness of Christ is attributed to all believers and as the writer of Hebrews will say later in Hebrews 10:10, He does that “once for all.” There is only one “source” of righteousness with God; His only begotten Son, Jesus. You have no righteousness of your own. I have no righteousness of my own. The blood of Jesus cleanses us all from our sins and binds us together as family. That’s why we are often referred to as “brothers and sisters in Christ.” We are all children of God, declared to be righteous (sanctified), through the sacrifice of Jesus on our behalf. We are all equal! No one is better or worse than anyone else. The truth is, we’re all sinners, saved by God’s grace based on God’s love. Steadman says, “But it was love for the lost human race that drove *both* Father and Son to choose that process.”<sup>15</sup>

When this truth is the central theme of church life you have a body of believers who understand that the ground at the foot of the cross is level. No one stands higher than anyone else. The unconditional acceptance by God based on the unconditional love of God becomes a foundation that fosters love and acceptance in the whole body. When the central theme of church life is your own works of righteousness, being more committed or dedicated, or trying harder you develop cliques of those who do more than others. You have competition to prove one’s worth or efforts to measure up to the acceptable standards of church life. What one does, what one gives, how

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<sup>13</sup> Raymond Brown, *The Message of Hebrews: Christ above All*, The Bible Speaks Today (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 56–57.

<sup>14</sup> Simon J. Kistemaker and William Hendriksen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, vol. 15, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953–2001), 68.

<sup>15</sup> Ray C. Stedman, *Hebrews*, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Westmont, IL: IVP Academic, 1992), Heb 2:10.

one serves become measures of one's value in the church. This fosters strife and contention rather than love and acceptance.

### **Learning to Love (Hebrews 2:11b-13)**

You see, through faith in Jesus we are all one big family. The blood we share is the shed blood of Jesus Christ who died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins and to purchase for us a place in heaven which he offers as a free gift. That gift is received through faith alone. It's not something you can earn or deserve. It's only given away. To attempt to pay for it is an insult to God's love. "He so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son so that anyone who believed in him would not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). The author of Hebrews is focusing on that truth in Chapter 2:11b-13. He writes that Christ makes us all equally holy in God's eyes and "That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers, saying, 'I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise.' And again, 'I will put my trust in him.' And again, 'Behold, I and the children God has given me.'"

The "congregation" is not about what we do, how hard we try to be holy, what role we play in the church, or anything else related to our own efforts. The people together sing and worship the one and only one that saves! It's about Jesus being at the center and the family gathering around the author and finisher of our faith. Jesus has called us to love Him and to love one another but that's impossible if we don't first have God's love. You can't give away something that you don't have. John put it this way, "We love (only) because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19). The only way for us to grow in the only commandment that means anything to Jesus, the commandment to love, is to wallow in His love for us as expressed on Calvary. Brothers and sisters who know they're loved by the Father and are growing in the understanding of that love, will grow in their love for one another.

Paul prayed, as the New International Version puts it in Ephesians 3:17-19, "I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God." It's truly not what we know, or what we do, or what we give, or how we serve, or how often we read our bibles that stimulates our growth as Christians. It's focusing our interests and our minds on what God has done for us in Christ; the greatest expression of His love. This is why the author of Hebrews tells us to think carefully, meticulously, inquisitively, and continuously on the person and work of Jesus. The Book of Hebrews is all about the importance of Jesus. The whole Bible is about the importance of Jesus.

### **For the Love of God! (Hebrews 2:14-15)**

There is an enemy in the world that draws us away from God's love to think that God really doesn't care that much about me. He is not a good God who has my best interests foremost in mind. Many people see God this way. He's a policeman hiding behind a billboard trying to catch me speeding. He's a boss trying to get the best performance out of me that's possible. Or like Job, the pains and hardships of life come headlong at us and we are tempted to question God's

goodness and his good intentions towards us. The power of Satan is seen in his leading us to think ill of God. In the Garden of Eden it was the thought that God was trying to keep something good from us in order to sustain His own supremacy as if that could ever be threatened. With Job the effort to demean God in Job's eyes revolved around the pain and hardships that Satan was allowed to bring upon him. When all his attempts failed to get Job to curse God, Satan attacks Job's own health and says to God, "Skin for Skin." Satan challenges God that Job will indeed curse Him to His face if he permits sickness and disease to strike Job. But Job held on and said, "Though He slays me, yet will I trust Him." "Naked came I into the world, and naked from it I will go." "The Lord gives and the Lord takes away, blessed be the name of the Lord."

Death is our supreme enemy! It casts a shadow across our lives from the moment we are born until the day it claims our flesh. We've all heard of the four teenage girls who died in a car accident in Gretna recently. What a tragedy! I couldn't help as I looked at their beautiful faces of the families and children and grandchildren the world will never see because of their premature death. Death is the greatest of our enemies. However, "flesh and blood" is part of being human. But God did not create man for death. He created us for life! The author of Hebrews is addressing this fact in Hebrews 2:14-15. He writes, "Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery."

Death is our supreme enemy and slave master. But Jesus had to come in the flesh, to become like us and one of us as a brother, and then to die the only death that could have destroyed the one who wields death as his instrument of slavery. God isn't trying to keep anything good from us. He only wants the best for us. He's not a policeman or a boss. He's our creator who, as Jeremiah puts it, "Loves us with an everlasting love." That love was undeniably demonstrated to us all on Calvary when he gave His only begotten Son. Sinking our roots into that love and growing in the understanding of that love enables us to enhance our view of God and begin to see others as God sees them! Only receiving and growing in our understanding of God's love for us will be able to grow in our love for God and others. This is how we mature spiritually. It's not by trying harder, doing more, becoming more committed.

### **It's Your Choice (Hebrews 2:16-18)**

The angels do not get the attention that God gives to us believers. That's one reason why the angels stare intently at Christ's work on our behalf. It's something that's not available to them. They are either fallen or unfallen! The fallen angels are irredeemable. They are what they are and can't be redeemed from their fallen state. It's because of their fallen state and willful continual rebellion against God that makes it impossible for their redemption. But mankind, for some reason, has received the blessings of redemption from our fallen nature. God sent His Son, not for the angels, but for you and me! The author of Hebrews begins the next passage, Hebrews 2:16-18 with this idea. He writes, "For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham. Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted."

The perfect humanity of Christ is an essential doctrine. As the first Adam failed and passed on that failure to us. The second Adam, Jesus, succeeded in all things and passes on His success to us through faith. That's why the writer talks about "offspring of Abraham." The Abrahamic covenant, unlike the Mosaic covenant, is based on God's unconditional promises. The Mosaic covenant is conditioned upon our obedience. The "tests" than Abraham endured were tests in regard to whether or not he was going to trust in God's positive disposition towards him or would he believe that lie that God was a policeman or his boss. It's important here to understand that the word for "temptation" is the same word for "testing" or "trials." The question associated with all these things is "will we trust God to have our best intentions foremost in mind regardless of our circumstances?" Job's faith in God's love was tested through some of the most difficult trials imaginable. Abraham was tested directly to see if he would trust God's love for him under all situations. He did, and that made him righteous. As the writer will tell us later in Hebrews, "it was by faith that Abraham offered Isaac."

God tells us something in this passage and everywhere in the New Testament. God loves us and sent his Son to be our merciful and faithful high priest. He made "propitiation" for our sins! He reconciled us to God and wiped away the account of our sins through his sacrifice on the cross as the ultimate demonstration of His love for us. I believe the question that the author of Hebrews is challenging us with is "are we going to believe that?" Did Jesus make us right with God? Or do we have to do it ourselves? Did Jesus "help" us in our failures in line with the first Adam by succeeding on our behalf? Is His success really ours? Do we trust in what Christ did for us, or do we trust in what we do for Him. Is God's love unconditional or do we have to earn it? Do we think more about being good and measuring up to standards, or do we trust Christ to have met all the standards for us? It's your choice.

### **Consider Jesus (Hebrews 3:1)**

Chapter 3 of Hebrews begins a fascinating study of the difference between Jesus and the Law. Whoever the writer is, it's obvious that he is well informed of the struggles that were facing the early church with regards to the place of the Old Testament Law in the lives of Christians, especially non-Jewish Christians. He is going to contrast Jesus with Moses. The Religious leaders in Jesus day often rejected Jesus because they said "We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from" (John 9:29). The term "Moses" did not just refer to the man himself, it was used to refer to the whole Pentateuch (Genesis through Deuteronomy) which Moses wrote. Moses is traditionally referred to as the "law-giver" because he wrote what has been known as the "law." The law is a third of the Old Testament and by Jesus day when people refer to Moses, they mean the Law. So the comparison the writer of Hebrews is making is between Jesus and the Law.

He knows the subject isn't going to be the easiest thing to talk about so he begins by exhorting his readers to "consider" his suggestions about Jesus and the Law. The Greek word is "katanoeo" (Greek: κατανοέω). According to the Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament

it means, “to give very careful consideration to some matter.”<sup>16</sup> According to the Theological Dictionary of the New Testament it means, “to direct one’s whole mind to an object, also from a higher standpoint to immerse oneself in it and hence to apprehend it in its whole compass.”<sup>17</sup> Because of these definitions I’m not satisfied with the standard English translation of “consider.” It doesn’t carry the intensity the Greek word suggests. Therefore, I’d subscribe to the New Living Translations phrase, “think carefully about this Jesus...” It more accurately reflects the author’s intent.

Please notice that verse 1 of Hebrews chapter 3 addresses Christians. The chapter begins with, “therefore, holy brothers, sharers in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus...” His appeal is to people he believes will be in heaven with him. He’s not threatening them in any way about the loss of their place in heaven, he’s addressing the experience of their faith in the here and now. This exhortation is not to try harder, to be better or more diligent in religious expressions. That’s work! He’s calling them to understand Jesus’ role more profoundly to find the rest that He promises. Jesus said in Matthew 11:29, “learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”

### **Jesus or Moses?(Hebrews 3:1)**

Moses’ name was synonymous with the law he mediated. But it’s important to remember that the man, himself, was profoundly revered in Israel throughout its history. He was chosen by God specifically. God spoke to Moses directly from the burning bush. Moses became their deliverer through a series of incredible miracles from the turning the snake to a stick and back again, turning water to blood and then 10 incredible plagues that distinguished between Egyptians and Israelites. He then opened the Red sea with his staff! He was the greatest of all the Prophets as well. In Numbers 12:7-8 God explains Moses’ superiority to the other prophets. God says when he calls prophets he reveals truths to them through dreams and visions but, ““Not so with my servant Moses. He is faithful in all my house. With him I speak mouth to mouth, clearly, and not in riddles, and he beholds the form of the LORD.”

There were a few other reasons that Moses was so highly revered by the Jews. He is the “Lawgiver.” Kent writes in his commentary, “Moses was the *lawgiver*. To the Jew, the Law was the greatest thing in all the world.”<sup>18</sup> Don’t forget that Moses was also the greatest Jewish historian. Through him came the history of creation and the connection of all Jews with Abraham and Noah. The Jews know who they are because of Moses. Moses could also be called the greatest high priest in Israel as well. His brother Aaron may have had the title, but it was Moses who made intercession for his people after the golden calf incident where Aaron was implicated. It was Moses who held up the rod for victory over the Amalekites with Aaron and Hur supported his arms. It was Moses who sprinkled the blood. Through all this, Moses was still called the “most humble” man in the Old Testament. According to Exodus 33:8, whenever Moses walked around the camp, the people would come out of their tents and stand to honor him.

Yes, Moses was all these things but Jesus is better! The author of Hebrews wants us to consider, or think carefully about Jesus. He says, ““Therefore, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly

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<sup>16</sup> Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, [\*Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains\*](#) (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 349.

<sup>17</sup> Johannes Behm and Ernst Würthwein, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 973.

<sup>18</sup> R. Kent Hughes, [\*Hebrews: An Anchor for the Soul\*](#), vol. 1, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1993), 90.

calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess.” Moses was great! But Jesus is greater. The College Press Commentary says, “He is our savior. Without his death we would die forever. With his death we can live forever. He is our high priest. No one else could enter God’s presence for us to make atonement for us. No one else could intercede for us like Jesus.”<sup>19</sup> When it comes to choosing between Moses and Jesus be sure to think carefully.

### **Choose Jesus (Hebrews 3:1)**

The first three verses of this book is about how Jesus is superior to the prophets. God speaks to us through Jesus now, not prophets. Hebrews 1:4-2:18 is about how Jesus is superior to the angels. The angels are messengers from God, but Jesus is both the messenger and the message from God. It’s in chapter 3 that begins his discussion about how Jesus is far superior to Moses and far more deserving of honor. To the Jews in Jesus’ day, Moses was the bomb! They rejected Jesus and claimed to be disciples of Moses (John 9:28-29). Pink writes, “During the most memorable portion of their history, all of God’s dealings with Israel were transacted through him (Moses). His position of nearness to Jehovah was remarkable, awesome, unique. He was in his own person, prophet, priest and king. Through him the whole of the Levitical economy was instituted. By him the Tabernacle was built. Thus we can well understand the high esteem in which the Jews held this favored man of God.”<sup>20</sup>

It was inconceivable to the Jewish leaders that this Jesus, standing before them in the flesh, was to be more highly esteemed and praised than Moses. That was heresy to even consider such a thing. But that’s exactly what the author of Hebrews called his readers to do; consider it! The first verse of chapter three calls us to think profoundly about it and to reflect on this “Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession.” Moses was certainly “sent” by God, as were all the prophets and angels of old. The Greek word for sent is “apostello.” An apostle was one sent by God. Moses certainly was an apostle in that regards but Jesus was “The” sent one! Moses was a prophet of old but Jesus was “the” apostle. Yes Moses performed prophetic miracles, but Jesus performed more! By the hand of God Moses did incredible miracles that delivered a whole nation from slavery, but Jesus did incredible miracles that delivered individuals from sickness, blindness, imprisonment and even death! Moses was sent by God to redeem a people. Jesus was sent by God to redeem all people!

It’s easy to see how Moses served as a priest to his people. He interceded for them when they broke the Law of God. He even dissuaded God from the entire destruction of the sinful nation. Moses offered sacrifices for the people. Moses sprinkled the blood for the people. Moses gave them drinkable water in a poisoned land. Yes, and more. Moses was certainly a priest for the people. But Jesus is “the” priest for all the people. He was the sacrifice that satisfies God’s anger over all sin. It’s His very own blood that eliminates the need for any other sacrifice from us. He completely and totally makes peace with God for us. When we choose to focus our attention on the law and our own righteousness we in essence choose Moses. The author of Hebrews is still addressing people who have been so ingrained and trained in religion that it’s inconceivable to turn from the law to Christ. That’s us! We still want religious rituals, restrictions and regulations

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<sup>19</sup> James Girdwood and Peter Verkruiyse, [Hebrews](#), The College Press NIV Commentary (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1997), Heb 3:1.

<sup>20</sup> Arthur Walkington Pink, [An Exposition of Hebrews](#) (Swengel, PA: Bible Truth Depot, 1954), 143.

in order to prove ourselves worthy rather than accept the grace of God that makes us worthy through faith in Jesus. We have a choice! Choose Jesus!

### **We believe in Jesus! (Hebrews 3:1)**

The author of Hebrews is speaking to those who have come to faith in Jesus and are living in the hope of heaven. This verse says, “Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession...” Our “confession” might more clearly be translated as our “profession.” The literal rendering of that Greek word is “say the same thing.” Guzik adds, “In regard to salvation, all Christians ‘say the same thing’ about their need for salvation and God’s provision in Jesus.”<sup>21</sup> The author is addressing those who have made a profession of faith in Jesus. He’s reminding them that they have chosen Jesus over Moses! The problem he addresses is that Moses, the Law, sneaks back into our lives and takes over our devotion. We become more interested in doing good and exhorting others to do good than being declared good through our faith in Christ.

Jesus calls us to “rest” in Him; “Come to me all of you who are burdened down with religion and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). He calls it rest for “your souls.” When we come to faith in Christ the burden of our failure under the law, our sins, is taken off our backs and we’re set free. We have true rest! Repentance is the acceptance of the reality of our own personal failure to live up to standards of the Law. But the pull of religion is extremely strong. Once we receive God’s forgiveness in Christ we are easily persuaded that we can now go back to living up to the standards of the law. But what invariably happens is we fail again and again. There is no “rest” in trying to live up to the standards of a law that was given to show us we can’t. The New Living Translation accurately renders Romans 3:20, “For no one can ever be made right with God by doing what the law commands. The law simply shows us how sinful we are.”

There is no rest in trying to live up to the standards of the law! But Jesus promises us “rest for our souls” if we come to him. Coming to faith in Christ is like coming in out of the wind and rain of the law. In Christ we find rest, protection and comfort. But the tendency in our flesh is to want to step back out into the storm of the law and demonstrate how we can stand up to it now. Once again we find there is no rest outside of Christ. He is the subject of our profession. Our faith is not about how good we might become or about how much we might accomplish in life. Our faith always sees Christ as the subject and looks to Him, reflects diligently on Him, and finds rest in Him. The problem that Paul addressed in Galatians and the author of the book of Hebrews seems to be addressing is not just “entering” into God’s rest, but staying there.

### **The building or the Builder?(Hebrews 3:2-3)**

The second verse of Hebrews chapter 3 continues the comparison between Moses and Jesus. It says that Jesus, “...was faithful to him who appointed him, just as Moses also was faithful in all God’s house.” It’s God’s testimony regarding Moses’ faithfulness not just the author of the Book of Hebrews. Back in the book of Numbers (12:7) when Aaron and Miriam challenged Moses’ authority, God speaks and says that in the past He spoke to prophets through dreams and visions, “But this is not true of my servant Moses; he is faithful in all my house.” It’s obvious that the writer of Hebrews is quoting from Numbers. Moses’ faithfulness is with respect to God’s house or household. This refers to the people of God. Moses did God’s bidding, although reluctantly,

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<sup>21</sup> David Guzik, [Hebrews](#), David Guzik’s Commentaries on the Bible (Santa Barbara, CA: David Guzik, 2013), Heb 3:1b.

in leading God's people out of slavery in Egypt. But Jesus had a more honorable role with respect to God's people.

Hebrews 3:3 explains that. Putting verses 2 and 3 together, It says, "... (Jesus) who was faithful to him who appointed him, just as Moses also was faithful in all God's house. For Jesus has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses—as much more glory as the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself." If "God's house" is referring to God's household as I believe it does, then it's right to say "in" God's house includes the fact that Moses was part of God's household. God chose him to a specific task within God's people and God stood up for Moses when he was challenged by others with respect to that calling.

The writer of Hebrews leans on what he had already said in Hebrews 1:2. God used to send his "Word" to his household through His prophets, of which Moses was one, "but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world." Moses was faithful to His calling and deserves recognition. But Jesus was the caller. Jesus was the builder of the house of which Moses was just a part of. Whereas Moses spoke words from God to God's people, Jesus is the "Word" of God Himself. Moses was a messenger. Jesus was both the messenger and the message! Choose the builder!

### **Moses Testimony, (Hebrews 3:5)**

In comparing Jesus with Moses, the author of Hebrews says that both Jesus and Moses were faithful to their calling. But Jesus deserves more honor just as the builder has more honor than the building. He then adds, "Now Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later.." Moses was a prophet and made some interesting predictions about the future. Most significant of which comes at the end of his five books in Deuteronomy. In chapter 31 and verse 29 Moses says that he knows they will disobey the laws that he brought to them from God. Although they spread out across two mountains and shouted "we will obey" back and forth Moses knew they would fail. This is probably part of what the writer of Hebrews was referring to but I'd argue there was something more.

When confronted by the religious leaders for healing a lame man on the Sabbath, Jesus rebuked them by saying, "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me" (John 5:39). Further in that discussion Jesus explains that there will be a witness against them for rejecting Him. He won't have to testify against them for their own prophet Moses will convict them. Jesus says in John 5:45-46, "Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father. There is one who accuses you: Moses, on whom you have set your hope. For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me." What did Moses say about Jesus. When the nation refuses to hear from the God on the mountain out of fear, Moses tells them that God will raise up a prophet from amongst themselves to speak to them. He says in Deuteronomy 18:18-19, "I will raise up a prophet like you from among their fellow Israelites. I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell the people everything I command him. I will personally deal with anyone who will not listen to the messages the prophet proclaims on my behalf."

Jesus is that Prophet! Moses' testimony stands as a witness to the future proclamations of Jesus. Moses was the greatest of Israelites' prophets. Whoever wrote the postscript to Moses' life

(Maybe Joshua) said of Moses, “And there has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face.” I find it interesting that when John writes in John 1:1, “In the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God.” The Greek phrase we translate “with God” is “pros ton theon.” Lenski suggests the phrase means Jesus was, “in the presence of God and turned in loving, inseparable communion toward God, and God turned equally toward him.”<sup>22</sup> According to another commentator, “The word was used to describe being ‘face to face’ with another.” I believe John is clearly identifying Jesus as the prophet that Moses prophesied about. So even Moses tells us, “Jesus is greater! Listen to Him!”

### **Jesus is my hope!(Hebrews 3:6)**

In his discussion about Jesus’ superiority to Moses, the author of Hebrews says that Moses was a faithful servant in “God’s house” and as a part of God’s house but Jesus was the builder of that house and therefore is deserving of more honor. He means we should pay very close attention to what Jesus has to say because, “Christ is faithful over God’s house as a son. And we are his house, if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope.” Moses was a “servant” in the house of God while Jesus is the son, heir, over God’s house of which Moses is part of. The writer made a big deal out of Jesus being superior to all the angels in chapter 1 because God never refers to them as His son. He says instead that angels are as the Contemporary English Version says, “Angels are merely spirits sent to serve people who are going to be saved.” Just as the angels are mere servants, so too is Moses. But Jesus is the begotten heir of the Father and is “over” the house of God.

The house of God is not referring to the tabernacle or the temple as some commentators suggest, rather it is referring to the People of God as verse 6 says, “we (the people) are His house.” The people of Israel made up the household of God in the Old Testament but in these days believers in Jesus make up the household of God in the church age. However, according to the last phrase in this verse there is something one must do to “remain” in the house of God. We must “hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope.” The most important thing to notice is that whatever this means it’s addressed to people, the author includes himself, who are already referred to as “brothers” who “share in the hope of heaven.”

They are believers in Jesus but they must persevere and, as Tanner points out, Their status as genuine believers does not guarantee this. In their earthly pilgrimage to the Son’s kingdom, they must be sure to ;hold fast.”<sup>23</sup> I’m arguing that what we must “hold fast” to is the all sufficiency of Christ! His righteousness satisfies God’s requirements for us. It is only this that gives God’s children rest from their labors as the writer will explain shortly. If we let the Law, Moses, have the prominent place in our daily living there is no rest. We still labor to earn God’s love and acceptance in His house. But that place has been purchased and paid for completely by Christ. He’s the builder of this house and we are part of that. We must hold fast to that truth and not let the focus on the law lure us from the peace we have as God’s children. My “confidence” is not in myself to keep Moses’ laws! I’ve already failed miserably in so many ways! My confidence is in

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<sup>22</sup> R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John’s Gospel* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961), 32–33.

<sup>23</sup> J. Paul Tanner, “[The Epistle to the Hebrews,](#)” in *The Grace New Testament Commentary*, ed. Robert N. Wilkin (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2010), 1042–1043.

His righteousness on my behalf. I have nothing to boast about in myself. The only boasting I have is in Christ alone. He is my hope! What's your hope?

### **What matters most (Hebrews 3:7-11)**

In Matthew 11:28-29 Jesus calls his listeners to “Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls.” The heavy burdens Jesus is referring to are those demands laid upon them by the religious leaders. They demand strict adherence to Moses to such an extent no one could ever live up to their expectations. But the Law is even heavier than the religious leaders thought. Jesus told them that the command against adultery included the idea of lusting. He told them that the command against murder dealt with hatred as well (See Matthew 5:27). The law of Moses as properly understood is a burden impossible for us to carry. Its intent, as Paul explains, is to make us conscious of our sinfulness. He makes it clear that any righteousness that we might attain through the law is insufficient. He says in Galatians 2:21 “if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.”

There is no rest in the law for anyone! But there is plenty of rest in Jesus. If we put our confidence and hope in Christ alone there is rest indeed. But even believers can miss out on this rest when they drift back into the system of law in which they must earn God's acceptance and love. There are always those around who will warn us and exhort us and nag us and cajole us of the importance of keeping God's laws! Even professing Christians slip from God's grace into the trap of law keeping and what happens to the rest we enjoy in Christ? It is gone! Hebrews 3:7-11 is a quote from Psalm 95 about the loss of God's rest by the children of Israel. It says, “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness, where your fathers put me to the test and saw my works for forty years. Therefore I was provoked with that generation, and said, they always go astray in their heart; they have not known my ways. As I swore in my wrath, they shall not enter my rest.”

There was no rest for that generation because they failed to trust God's promise to give them rest across the Jordan but they lost confidence in God's provision and forfeited rest. The generation that came out of Egypt remained God's household even though they didn't enjoy the rest he promised them. The loss of enjoying Jesus' rest is still a possibility for true believers today. Tanner observes, “This warning is directed to God's people (genuine believers) indicating that believers are capable of hardening their hearts against God and experiencing His judgment. To suggest that all those who died in the wilderness were unbelievers (and eventually went to hell) is simply not sustainable.”<sup>24</sup> If we step out of wonderful rest Jesus gives us from the impossible demands and burdens of the law, we will miss out on what matters most in life.

### **What is a Hard Heart? (Hebrews 3:7)**

In Hebrews 3:7, the author says that the Israelites failed to enter the rest across the Jordan because they had “hard hearts.” It seems that the Bible uses the idea of a hard heart when it

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<sup>24</sup> J. Paul Tanner, [“The Epistle to the Hebrews,”](#) in *The Grace New Testament Commentary*, ed. Robert N. Wilkin (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2010), 1043.

refers to those who reject God's Word for whatever reason. The Israelites referred to in Psalm 95 as quoted by the author of Hebrews failed to believe God's promise of rest beyond the Jordan because of fear of those who already occupied the land. They truly liked what they saw. Their report included the fact that the grapes and fruits were better than anything they had ever seen. But to them it was too good to be true. Coming from a life of slavery for about 400 years they could not believe that God intended such a wonderful thing for them and that it was theirs simply for the taking. They wouldn't believe that because their hearts were hard.

Jesus frequently called those who rejected his wonderful message of saving grace apart from the confines of the Law hard hearted. He wants to save them and us from slavery under a system that we could never live up to and from which we could never be free on our own. All of us, under the law, are sin-sick and cannot help ourselves. Jesus said, "For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them" (Matthew 13:15). Even believers sometimes fall into the trap of unbelief because Jesus' message is just too good to be true. Even Jesus disciples had trouble with this. "Afterward he appeared to the eleven themselves as they were reclining at table, and he rebuked them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who saw him after he had risen" (Mark 16:14).

What's too good to be true? What's so hard to believe? Righteousness is ours apart from the Law. Jesus fulfilled the demands of the law on our behalf. The only righteousness available to us today is free! It's the gift of God through faith in Jesus Christ. That's too good to be true. Jesus declared that the Old Testament was about Himself and that Moses testified to this truth. But legalists cannot hear that. The Amplified Bible translates 2 Corinthians 3:14 this way, "In fact, their minds were grown hard and calloused [they had become dull and had lost the power of understanding]; for until this present day, when the Old Testament (the old covenant) is being read, that same veil still lies [on their hearts], not being lifted [to reveal] that in Christ it is made void and done away." When we focus on what we do, rather than on what Christ did for us we will lose out on God's rest. Paul says in Galatians 2:21 "if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose."

### **Standing Firm in the Faith (Hebrews 3:12-15)**

The author of the book of Hebrews is so grieved by the possibility of even true believers falling away from the joys of their salvation through Christ alone, he continues exhorting them against having hard hearts to the free gift of God's grace through faith in Christ. The truth is we are so easily beguiled by legalists, even today, that this warning and exhortation is still relevant. In verses 12-15 he repeats the warning with even stronger emphasis. He writes, "Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called 'today,' that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end. As it is said, 'Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.'"

I know it sounds too good to be true, but salvation by grace through faith alone is the promise of Christ. Unbelieving hearts are “evil” because if Christ’s righteousness is dismissed we only have our own works of righteousness to trust in and they are as “filthy rags” to God (Isaiah 64:6). We have deserted the rest that comes with Christ and have reverted to living under the confines of the law which continually condemns us of our sinfulness. Even true believers can do that as we see again in the beginning phrase which addresses his readers as “brothers.” Sin the most deceitful thing! It convinces us of our worthlessness and abandons us to our own resources which are so inadequate. But Jesus filled the bill and meets our needs.

Regular, daily, exhortation is needed by us all because it’s our lot in life to want to fall back into the religion of self-justification. We grew up with the idea of sowing and reaping and we know that it’s too good to be true that we sowed sin but Jesus reaped the consequences for us on the Cross. I need to try harder! I need to do more! I need, I need, I need! Unfortunately most pulpits continue to exhort people to try harder instead of exhorting people to stand firm and hold on strong to the truth that my needs have been met in Christ. The Lord is my shepherd. He is the great shepherd and “I do not want.”

### **Unbelief is disobedience (Hebrews 3:16-19)**

Those that lost out on rest in the Promised Land according to the author of the book of Hebrews were those Israelites who failed to trust God to deliver on His promises. He promised them a physical land that was flowing with milk and honey and when the 10 spies saw this land they certainly agreed that it flowed with milk and honey and some of the largest fruit they’d ever seen. There was one word that followed their acknowledgement of the desirability of that land. That one word is “but.” That’s found in Numbers 13:28. They give a favorable report of the land and then say “But the people who dwell there are strong...” They were looking only at their own abilities and resources and ended up saying in effect, “God can’t keep His promises.” We know our own limitations and don’t believe that God can or God won’t bring about on His own His promises to give us rest in this wonderful land. The “disobedience” referred to by Hebrews is not breaking any of the laws of Moses, disobedience is their (and ours) failure to trust in God’s good intentions toward us.

Hebrews 3:16-19 makes that very clear. It says, “For who were those who heard and yet rebelled? Was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses? And with whom was he provoked for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient? So we see that they were unable to enter because of **unbelief.**” Notice the first part, they heard God’s Word, His promise, but yet couldn’t believe it!

This unbelief is tantamount to an unbelief in God’s pure love for mankind. The bible, Old Testament and New, speak to us of God’s “steadfast” or “everlasting” love frequently. From the earliest times in Genesis through the final thoughts from Malachi it’s recorded that it’s God love for man that moves him to promise and fulfill those promises. All creation speaks to us of God’s love. Even the destruction of evil speaks to us of God’s love for all mankind. He has good intentions for them and for us. **But** we, like the 10 spies at Kadesh Barnea, sometimes see physical evidence that contradicts this fact. Faith is not believing that God exists. Even the Devil does that. Faith is believing that God loves me and has good plans for me and my future.

Jeremiah exhorts his people in the midst of great trials with God's words, "I know the plans I have for you declares the Lord; plans to prosper you, not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." To receive God's love is to receive Jesus Christ because Paul wrote another "but." He said in Romans 5:8, "But God demonstrates His own love for us in this; while we were yet sinners Christ died for us." Failure to trust God's love is disobedience.

### **Enter His Rest! (Hebrews 4:1)**

The author of Hebrews goes on with his comparison of the Israelites at Kadesh Barnea and the Christians of his day (and our day!). All the Israelites in the wilderness were called out of Egypt. They heard Moses' call for God, packed their goods, gathered their children and followed Moses through the Red Sea and into the Sinai Peninsula. Yet they did not enter into God's rest. When quoting Psalm 95, the writer states that it's unbelief that prevented them from "entering My Rest." It is God's rest that is being discussed. His rest, God's rest, is the subject of this passage and what follows. The handbook for translators says, "The key word in this new stage in the interpretation of Psalm 95:7-11 is *rest*, found in the last line of the quotation. This line is quoted in 3:11, repeated for emphasis in 4:3, 5, and linked in 4:4 with Genesis 2:2, which also speaks of God's *rest*."<sup>25</sup>

The Hebrews author wants his readers to know that this promise of God's rest is still real. He writes, "Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it." The reference in Genesis 2 is speaking of God's Sabbath rest after creation. The 10 commandments makes the seventh day a "holy" day because God finished all His work and rested. We too can enjoy that rest when we cease from our own striving and just trust God's promises. Jesus calls us to His rest in Matthew 11:28. He says, "Come to me all of you who are over-burdened and burned out on religion and I will give you my rest." God does all the necessary work. He promised Israel He would do the work at Kadesh Barnea but they didn't believe Him. He promises us now that just as it was all finished by the seventh day, so too was the work necessary for us to enter into God's rest accomplished by the Sabbath day thousands of years later when Jesus said on the Cross "it is finished."

Many Christians, true believers in Jesus, are not enjoying God's rest offered through Jesus Christ because they are still afraid of not living up to God's standards of the Law. Preachers don't often help that situation by continually hanging heavy loads and religious obligations over the heads of the congregation instead of feeding them with the Good News of Christ's complete sufficiency. God calls each of us today to not only believe in Christ but to rest confidently in His finished work on the cross on our behalf.

### **Resting in God's Work (Hebrews 4:2)**

Hebrews 4:2 continues the writer's discussion about God's rest. He uses the phrase "good news" as a synonym for "God's rest." He writes, "For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened." I believe he's still talking about the rest promised to the children of Israel when Moses

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<sup>25</sup> Paul Ellingworth and Eugene Albert Nida, [\*A Handbook on the Letter to the Hebrews\*](#), UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1994), 71.

led them out of Egypt into the wilderness. They came to the borders of the Promised Land and sent in 12 spies. Joshua and Caleb came back with a great report about the quality of the land and confidence that God was going to give it to them. But there were 10 other spies who agreed that the land was most desirable but didn't trust God to give it to them. Instead of focusing on God's promises and remembering all His miracles on their behalf they looked at the enemy and the challenge before them. Even though they were the chosen children of God and had followed Moses out of Egypt, they did not get to enjoy God's rest in the Promised Land. They simply did not trust God's work on their behalf. They looked at themselves only and missed the joy of God's rest in the land of milk and honey.

Now, the same "good news" was preached to us according to this verse. We call this "good news" the "Gospel." It's referred to throughout the New Testament as "God's Word" as well. It's the message of God's love demonstrated for us on Calvary. God's love for us, expressed on the cross, was God doing for us something we could never do for ourselves. God Himself, in the perfect humanity of His only begotten Son, became the perfect sacrifice for our sins in order to destroy our enemy and acquire "God's rest" for us who believe. In Genesis, God finished all his work and he "rested." The seventh day, the Sabbath, was God's rest that the fourth commandment calls us to enjoy as well. We should not work on that day because the work as all been accomplished by God.

Just as God completed all his work in Genesis and said on the seventh day, "It's finished." So too did Jesus accomplish all the work necessary for salvation and said "It is finished." The most important work of God was done through the frailty of His son. The law which condemns us all has been satisfied by His perfection. But like many in Caleb and Joshua's day we don't reap the benefit of God's work on our behalf because we're still focused on ourselves. We're grasshoppers! The sad thing is we like to be reminded that we're grasshoppers. It feels good to be convicted of our failures. We like to be told we're missing the mark so we can try harder. We're Christians alright but in our flesh we listen to all the voices around us reminding us of how we should try harder and become more dedicated and do more for Jesus. Jesus did not say, "come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I'll give you something else to do!" No! He said "come to me and I will give you rest." Don't listen to the plethora of voices reminding you that you're grasshoppers! Hear, listen to, and keep your hearts focused on the good news of God's love for you once and for all demonstrated on Calvary.

### **Resting in Christ (Hebrews 4:3)**

In verse 3 of Hebrews chapter 4, the writer says that along with some others he has enjoyed the experience of having entered into God's rest. He seems to argue that it's available for all Christians but many do not enjoy it for one reason or another. He writes, "For we who have believed enter that rest, as he has said, 'As I swore in my wrath, they shall not enter my rest,' although his works were finished from the foundation of the world." I like the way one commentator explains this verse. He writes, "At the moment—in principle but not yet in full realization—we are entering that rest. As long as we keep our eyes fixed on 'Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith' (Heb. 12:2), we enjoy the rest God has promised, and eventually we shall be with him eternally."<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Simon J. Kistemaker and William Hendriksen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, vol. 15, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953–2001), 107.

Much of the material Christians read and listen to today present a flawed view of the Good News of God's rest for believers. They say that the Gospel is just the starting point for true believers. It's the door by which we enter, but once we're in the room, we now turn back to religious expressions and practices in order to grow in our faith. My contention and that of some others is that the Gospel is not a door that gets you into the room in which you try harder. It's the entire room itself. We enter into the Christian experience by faith in Jesus and what he's accomplished for us on the cross. But the Gospel message of salvation by grace through faith alone is the place we must abide to enjoy God's rest. Another commentator says, speaking about this verse, "The author's application of this principle is that when we—by faith—enter into a life of rest, it is no longer necessary to *attain*, but only to *maintain* that rest into which we have entered by faith."<sup>27</sup>

There is no rest for those who live on the cusp of God's acceptance based on their own behavior and performance. We've already failed on that principle and that's the very purpose of the law. Paul says it was given to make us aware of our sinfulness. Paul adds in Galatians 2:21, "...for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose." Once we believe in Jesus we don't move on to something better because there is nothing better. We don't receive our salvation by grace through faith and then perfect it through our own works! The many exhortations directed at believers in the Bible are all, in one way or another, to stay or abide in Christ's finished work on our behalf. You can't add anything to that! Relax! Or should I say "rest?"

### **The Work is done! (Hebrews 4:4-5)**

The Hebrew word for "seven" and the Hebrew word for "rest" is the same word. That of course finds its source in Genesis 2 where God created everything that exists in six days and took a day off. That seventh day became known as the Sabbath. After the seventh day, day of rest, God did not pick up his creative activity again. There was nothing left to do! He had accomplished it all. Pentecost says, "Because the work of creation was completed in six days, it was not necessary for God to resume work after a temporary rest. Instead, with the completion of creation, God entered into a permanent state of rest. While God worked in six days to bring creation to its desired conclusion, once that work was completed, no additional work was necessary."<sup>28</sup> The author of Hebrews begins verse 4 of chapter 4 with this statement: "For he has somewhere spoken of the seventh day in this way: 'And God rested on the seventh day from all his works.' And again in this passage he said, 'They shall not enter my rest.'"

There is a "rest" available to you and me today. Those who trust completely in the finished work of Christ can enjoy this rest. Those who reject Christ have no rest. My mother used to say, "There's no rest for the wicked." But I think this writer is referring to Christians who will not enter into God's rest in this life because they are still trusting in working for it themselves. He has called them "brothers" too often to be speaking to unbelievers. This rest comes in relying completely on the finished work of Christ. Pentecost goes on to say, "How interesting that God Himself is the author of rest! And the divine rest God instituted following creation is still continuing today. That means that although we live in one of the most hurried, tense, tumultuous

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<sup>27</sup> J. Dwight Pentecost and Ken Durham, [\*Faith That Endures : A Practical Commentary on the Book of Hebrews\*](#), Rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2000), 84.

<sup>28</sup> J. Dwight Pentecost and Ken Durham, [\*Faith That Endures : A Practical Commentary on the Book of Hebrews\*](#), Rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2000), 84.

societies that has ever existed, we can experience His perfect rest by maintaining and cultivating our relationship with Him.”<sup>29</sup>

All the Israelites who left Egypt were God’s people. Yet not all God’s people enter into His rest. In fact, the disobedience of unbelief kept them out and it keeps us out often as well. Don’t think you can enter into God’s rest by doing something to earn or deserve it. Don’t think you can enjoy peace with God if there is still something remaining to be accomplished. If there is something more to be done then we’ll never rest. When Christ said on the cross “it is finished.” He was referring to the work of salvation. When God finishes His creation work everything that needs to be done has been done. When Jesus finishes His salvation work, everything that needs to be done has been done. There will never be rest, even for believers in Jesus, for those who do not trust fully in the finished work of Christ. Add anything to Christ’s work and we lose everything.

### **Rest from our Works (Hebrews 4:6-7)**

The author of Hebrews wants his believing readers to understand that the enjoyment of, or entering into, God’s rest is something that must be done every day. There are moments in life where I would catch a glimpse of the grand salvation by grace through faith alone that we have in Christ but then I go back to work. The alarm goes off on Monday morning. The boss calls me into his office. A homework assignment is due tomorrow. A task must be accomplished by a certain deadline. The bills have to be paid by the end of the month. This world of sowing and reaping in which we all live everyday will drag us back into the “you get what you deserve” system so fast it makes your head spin. But we’re not to let that destroy our faith and trust in Jesus. His rest is still there waiting for us to come back. The author writes in Hebrews 4:6-7, “Since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience, again he appoints a certain day, ‘Today,’ saying through David so long afterward, in the words already quoted, ‘Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.’”

Jesus wanted us to remember him regularly in the communion services. The bread represents Jesus’ body that was offered up for our sins on the cross. The wine represents his shed blood through which we find forgiveness of all our sins. We are called to regularly reflect on the work that Christ accomplished for us. It is something we could never do for ourselves. He was the perfect sacrifice. He was the only “human” that could die a death for all mankind. He not only took upon himself our sins when he died on the cross but also through faith he transfers his perfect righteousness into our bankrupt accounts. In Him we have peace with God through faith. In Him we indeed find true peace even though we fail in the world of sowing and reaping so often. No one lives up to the standards of the law. Admit it!

Jesus’ invitation to “come to me, all who are burdened and heavy laden” is still there. It has been preserved in scripture for us all every day. But religion hardens our hearts! We have learned from an early age that we must pay for our own sins! We have numerous ways of saying this in our society. We made our bed and now we must lay in it. If we want to dance we have to pay the piper. If it’s to be, it’s up to me! There’s no such thing as a free lunch! If it sounds too good to be true, it is! Yes, indeed, salvation by grace through faith alone sounds too good to be true for religious people. They insist on judging others on a standard of performance that is completely

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<sup>29</sup> J. Dwight Pentecost and Ken Durham, [\*Faith That Endures : A Practical Commentary on the Book of Hebrews\*](#), Rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2000), 84.

unattainable! With hard hearts towards their own sinfulness, the religious people were confronted by Jesus with their own failures. They have hated. That means they have committed murder. They have lusted. That means they have committed adultery. Only hard hearts continue to insist on their own righteousness and measure others based on their own standards. We've all fallen short in our own ways and our only hope for rest is in the arms of He who died for our failures and purchases a place for us at His own expense. "Come to me," He says, "and rest from your works."

### **Trusting Jesus' Work (Hebrews 4:8-10)**

I'm of the opinion that the writer of Hebrews is careful with his language with regard to how he addresses his readers. He wants them to be clear on the fact that he's talking to believers here. He has referred to them as brothers and sisters earlier and included them with himself in those anticipating their heavenly homes. In Hebrews 4:8-10, He is talking to his readers as "the people of God." He writes, "For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his."

The translator's handbook makes this passage a little easier for us. It says, "If the noun *rest* is rendered as a verb, 'to rest,' then *that God had promised* may be translated as 'in the way in which God had promised them.'"<sup>30</sup> God had "rest" in mind for His people. But it wasn't the kind of rest they would experience by just sitting down and wiping the sweat from their foreheads. God promised them something much more significant. It would be of a more permanent nature and would be a "rest for our souls." It was a rest that wasn't based on what we could earn or deserve. It was a rest that was based on a finished work of God. It was a true rest from the demands of our lives in a fallen world where sowing and reaping is the rule. It is a rest from all our "falling short." It's a rest from all our "failure to measure up." It's a rest from all the religious demands and expectations. It's a true deliverance from the heavy burdens of life and religion that always leave us stressed out wondering if we've been good enough. It's rest from those nagging reminders that we always could have done more!

"God's rest" is the rest that Jesus calls us to. It's Jesus' rest. It's a rest from the stress and strife of trying to measure up because through our faith in Christ we know He has measured up to God's standards for us. He came not to destroy the laws of sowing and reaping or to eliminate the laws of good and evil, but he came to completely satisfy them on my behalf and on your behalf! I don't measure up! You don't measure up! Nobody measures up! The writer of Hebrews is well aware of the fact that many of his readers believe that Jesus opened the door for them and welcomed them into the household of the people of God. But they are insisting that to stay in that room one must keep another list of religious obligations and expectations. There's no rest in that room. Our eyes are on Jesus until we enter the room and then we must take them off of Him and put them on ourselves again. Once again we're trusting in our own works and not the finished work of Jesus. The only way to enjoy God's, Jesus', rest is to trust completely in His work realizing it is so complete that we can add nothing to it! There's the rest Jesus calls us to.

### **An Exhortation to Rest! (Hebrews 4:11)**

The Bible, including the New Testament, is full of various exhortations. Many of them are connected to other ideas which must not be dismissed when trying to understand what we're

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<sup>30</sup> Paul Ellingworth and Eugene Albert Nida, [\*A Handbook on the Letter to the Hebrews\*](#), UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1994), 79.

exhorted to do. In Hebrews 4:1-10 we've seen that "God's rest" is still available for us to enter. It's not the departure from Egypt that the writer is addressing or the rest Joshua would bring when they entered the Promised Land, but it was Jesus' rest. It was a more profound kind of rest. It was rest for our souls. The writer compared it to creation rest. After six days of creation God stopped or ceased. The Sabbath (see Exodus 20 devotions) is the time to cease from all our works and focus on the finished work of God. Those who have entered into Jesus' rest have ceased from their own works just as God has ceased from His on the seventh day. The Israelites were exhorted to stop working and focus on the work that had been completed for them. The same is true for us today. The rest for us is on the Lord's day. It's the day we focus all our attention on the work that Jesus completed for us and which He personally proclaimed as "finished" on the cross.

Based on all this discussion the writer then exhorts his readers in Hebrews 4:11 which says, "Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience." This exhortation is just like the 4<sup>th</sup> commandment to keep holy the Sabbath day. How do you keep it holy, "you cease from all your works." It's an exhortation alright, but it's an exhortation to "stop working" and "rest" in the finished work of Christ. Trusting in the complete sufficiency of Christ is not easy! We live in a world of sowing and reaping and it's nearly impossible in many cases to stop relying on ourselves and our own efforts and simply trust Jesus. I like the brief comment by another commentator: "We must **enter that rest**. Clearly, the rest is entered by *faith*; but it takes **diligent** faith. This shows us that faith is not *passive*; it takes *diligence* to trust in, rely on, and cling to Jesus and His work for us."<sup>31</sup>

When the writer mentions "the same sort of disobedience" he's referring to those at Kadesh Barnea who, instead of trusting in God and His promises, they looked to themselves and their own abilities. Disobedience in this case is "unbelief" as the author mentioned earlier. The exhortation is to trust God and His work and not follow the example of those in the wilderness. The Handbook for Translators explains this Greek word for disobedience. It says, "The Greek word means 'example,' ...it should be made clear that a bad example is meant."<sup>32</sup> The point of verse 11's exhortation is to rest confidently in God's work. It's not an exhortation to try harder to be a better person or do more or give more or serve more. Another commentator says, "...although we live in one of the most hurried, tense, tumultuous societies that has ever existed, we can experience His perfect rest by maintaining and cultivating our relationship with Him. But we must take time out from our own busy lives to do that."<sup>33</sup> If we're ever going to experience Jesus' rest we have to stop relying on ourselves and fully trust Him.

### **Jesus is God's Word (Hebrews 4:12)**

I believe Hebrews 4:12 is one of the most misunderstood verses in the Bible. Hebrews 4:12 says, "For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions

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<sup>31</sup> David Guzik, [Hebrews](#), David Guzik's Commentaries on the Bible (Santa Barbara, CA: David Guzik, 2013), Heb 4:11.

<sup>32</sup> Paul Ellingworth and Eugene Albert Nida, [A Handbook on the Letter to the Hebrews](#), UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1994), 82–83.

<sup>33</sup> J. Dwight Pentecost and Ken Durham, [Faith That Endures : A Practical Commentary on the Book of Hebrews](#), Rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2000), 84.

of the heart.” The traditional understanding of this verse argues the “the word of God” is referring to the entire Bible. If we’re going to experience God’s rest as mentioned in the first 11 verses of Chapter 4, we’re going to have to spend more time in the Bible. Now, I love my Bible. It’s God’s “word” to all mankind. Don’t mistake my words here! But if we’re going to remain true to the context of this passage we must at least consider the author referring to God’s Message to us. He’s not talking about the details of Genesis through Revelation. He’s talking about the Good News in Jesus Christ.

Jesus is the “logos:” the Word of God in the flesh. The whole Bible is about God’s love for mankind! It’s true from Genesis 1 to the end of Malachi. But in Jesus, “The Word became Flesh.” Romans 5:8 is a key verse to understanding Jesus’ role in fulfilling the whole Old Testament. It says, “But God **demonstrated** His love for us in this; while we were still sinners Christ died for us.” God’s working with man was always a divine work of love but it seems to have been rejected in so many ways. But in Jesus, that Love cannot be denied; “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him will not perish, but have everlasting life.”

The Law is not “living and active” but God’s love in Jesus is! The Law does not touch our being at the deepest parts, but God’s love in Jesus does. God’s law does not speak to us at the deepest level and move our hearts to love God and others in return. But God’s love in Jesus does. When we read New Testament passages that talk about “the word of God” be careful not to relegate that to a simple understanding of the Bible in and of itself. It’s referring to the “message” (Logos) of the Bible, which is God’s love for all mankind exhibited for everyone once and for all on the cross of Calvary. This is what the whole Bible is about! If you maintain your focus on Jesus while reading your Bible you will learn marvelous truths that will change the way you see everything in the world. It will especially change the way you see God and the way you read the Bible.

### **We All Have Dirty Hands (Hebrews 4:13)**

We can’t hide from God. God is, as theologians like to say is, “Omnipresent, omniscient and omnipotent.” He is everywhere. He is all knowing and He is all powerful. It was once said that Jesus didn’t have to have anyone tell him about people because he knew what was in every man (See John 2:25). These “Omni” traits of God are one of two things. First, they can be extremely frightening. We are afraid of a God who watches our every move and monitors our every thought. On the other hand, if we can understand what Jesus has done for us, God’s “Omni” traits are quite comforting. He’s with me wherever I go. He knows everything about me. He’s able to do above and beyond anything we could think or ask. The author of Hebrews seems to be pointing this out to his readers so he can encourage them with the truth of the second approach. He writes in, Hebrews 4:13, “And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.”

You and I do not have any skeletons in our closets with God. He is intimately aware of every act, thought and even the motives of our hearts. The deepest, darkest parts of our being are all very well known by God. This verse is following up on Hebrews 4:12 which talks about “God’s Word” being able to cut through the bone and joints and marrow to reach into our deepest regions and even discern between our soul and spirit. He is able to discern “the intentions of the heart.” In Matthew 15:19-20, Jesus mentioned what man’s heart was like. He said, “For out of

the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person. But to eat with unwashed hands does not defile anyone.” Jesus is identifying himself with the God of Jeremiah 17:9-10. It says, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it? I the LORD search the heart and test the mind...”

When I preach on God’s “Omniscience” (All knowing) my first point is always, “What God Knows about Me.” Of course the obvious answer to that is “everything!” He surely knows the condition of our hearts. We’re not hiding anything from Him. But the beauty in this reality, and what brings real comfort to me is that, yes, God’ knows all about me but He loves me anyway. This truth was declared by Jeremiah several times. He said as is recorded in Jeremiah 31:3, “I have loved you with an everlasting love.” God’s love for mankind is the subject of the Old Testament. God’s love finds its ultimate expression on the Cross of Calvary. That’s why Paul says, “But God demonstrated His own love for us in this; while we were still sinners Christ died for us.” The Bible is the expression of God’s love for us all in spite of our crooked hearts. The Cross is the ultimate demonstration of that love. Jesus is God’s Word that cuts deep into us and exposes us and cleanses us at the same time. We’re all equal! The ground at the foot of the cross is level! I’ll never understand why we spend so much time focusing on the unwashed hands of others instead of dealing with own dirty hands.

### **Hold Fast to Jesus (Hebrews 4:14)**

The religious leaders of Jesus’ day (and ours) focus on the externals! They worried about rituals and special observances instead of what’s in the heart. Jesus would often confront them by pointing to the reality of their defiled hearts even though they observe the washing of hands and Sabbaths, etc., according to the Law of Moses. To religious leaders it is all about “behavior” alone and what it looks like from the outside. Jesus, God’s Word, cuts through all that into the core of our being beyond the bone, joints, marrow and discerns the condition of our heart as verse 12 says and then in verse 13 he reminds us that no one can hide their thoughts or the condition of their heart from Jesus. Here is what Jesus said in Matthew 15:19-20, “For from the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, sexual immoralities, thefts, false testimonies, blasphemies. These are the things that defile a man, but eating with unwashed hands does not defile a man.”

Repentance involves more than admitting that we’ve done something wrong. Repentance involves acknowledging the condition of our heart. It’s not just that we have sinned, it’s more of the fact that we are sinners by nature. Sinners cannot enter into the presence of God! The High Priest in Israel would enter into God’s presence into the Holy of Holies on behalf of sinners and offer a sacrifice that would make “atonement” for the sins of the people. In 70 AD the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed and the Jews had no way to have their sins atoned for. This may have been one of the struggles with the audience of the Letter of Hebrews. But the writer wants them to know that it’s not a matter of “externals” anymore. And as mentioned earlier, Jesus is not only the perfect acceptable sacrifice He is also the one who offers the sacrifice: The Priest. He’s not just any old priest; He’s the High Priest of us all. He didn’t enter into the presents of God in a physical, temporary Temple. Oh No! Hebrews 4:14 says, “Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.” He’s in the very presence of God in Heaven interceding on our behalf.

One commentator writes, “Our High Priest, Jesus, has ‘passed through the heavens,’ and is now enthroned at the Father’s right hand. His exalted position is the ground of Christian confidence.

The earthly High Priest could enter the Holy of Holies but once a year. Our High Priest is now in Heaven where He is seated at the Father's right hand."<sup>34</sup> The religious leaders and religious people of today want to "hold fast" to religious obligations and external performances. We're given "five ways" to get closer to God, for example, as if Jesus didn't bring us close enough. We're instructed on what we should do to become better Christians is if Jesus didn't do enough. To religious people it is all about what we "do" instead of what Jesus "did." According to Paul the way a Christian matures has to do with the core of our being, our hearts, not with our behavior. It's about our foundation, our roots! He prays that the Ephesians, instead of trying harder, would sink their roots down deep into God's love. God's ultimate demonstration of His Love for us was in His Son, Jesus, on the cross of Calvary. God's love will send the nutrients into the core of your being through which you will grow and His love in us will produce the fruits of the Spirit; love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, kindness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. We don't "hold fast" to ceremonies or washing of hands! We hold fast to the Work of Jesus which cleanses us from all sin.

### **Jesus Feels You! (Hebrews 4:15)**

Jesus sympathizes with us in our human predicament because he was fully human yet without sin. He knows the draw of the pride of life, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes. He was tempted in all of those areas yet He remained without sin. He knows the full force of temptation which none of us ever feel. I think it was C.S. Lewis who said you don't feel the full force of the wind by turning your back to it. You only feel it when you face it head on. Jesus faced our situation fully head on. I think this is the main point of the next verse. Hebrews 4:15 says, "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin."

Adam didn't feel the force. Abraham didn't feel the force. Noah didn't feel the force, Moses didn't feel the force! Aaron, the priest, didn't feel the full force of the wind. Jesus is the only one who faced the wind head on and never flinched. We have all flinched. But the point of this verse is that Jesus knows our pain. He isn't a god who is far off like the god's of Greece and Rome. He is a loving God who cares so much about us that he feels our pains along with us. According to the Oxford Companion to Music, "If two tuning-forks of the same pitch be placed in position for sounding and one of them be set in vibration, the other will take up the vibrations sympathetically; the first fork is then a generator of sound and the second a resonator." Hughes quotes this and adds, "His instrument, so to speak, was the same as ours. It is a fact that if you have two pianos in the same room and a note is struck on one, the same note will gently respond on the other, though not touched by another's hand. This is called 'sympathetic resonance.' Christ's instrument was just like ours in every way. And hear this! He took that instrument, that body, to Heaven with him. It is his priestly body. And when a chord is struck in the weakness of our human instrument, it resonates in his!"<sup>35</sup>

The Law written on stone tablets gives no mercy and has no grace. It is inscribed on stone and can't be changed. The religious leaders and Judaizers that caused Jesus such trouble as well as Paul and others who put Jesus above all such things, had no sympathy for the hurting. Jesus

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<sup>34</sup> Charles F. Pfeiffer, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Everyman's Bible Commentary (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1962), 40.

<sup>35</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Hebrews: An Anchor for the Soul*, vol. 1, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1993), 130.

healed a man blind from birth. The religious leaders accused him of violating the Sabbath. They had no concern for the life-long pain of the healed. Jesus brought Lazarus back from the dead and the religious leaders wanted them both executed for some violation of their laws. They had no compassion or sympathy for them. Moses, his law, the priesthood and even the Temple itself cannot feel you! It demands that we be stoned to death for our adulteries. It calls for blood! Jesus is so much more important than everything else! He poured out His blood for you and me.

### **Grace, Mercy and Love (Hebrews 4:16)**

According to the writer of Hebrews, those who are trusting in Christ as the ultimate and final “word” of God rather than the prophets, or the priests, or Moses or the Law can be confident to personally approach God. We don’t need the prophets to speak for God. Jesus has brought God’s ultimate message to us. Actually, the message of the Prophets is the message of Jesus. We don’t need Priests to intercede with God for us to calm his anger for our sin, Jesus has managed that for us. We don’t need Moses or his laws by which to measure our standing before God because Jesus fulfilled it at every point at which we’ve failed. Hebrews 4:16 says, “Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

Grace and mercy are two things that only sinners need. If you can stand before God on the basis of your own performance you don’t need either. This is the case with the religious leaders of Jesus’ day. In comparing themselves with others, they could always find something to help them feel superior. We can too. But the standard isn’t just being better than someone else, it’s being perfect! You only need grace and mercy when you realize you’re living under a cloud of guilt and failure. We all deserve to reap the consequences of our actions. We have all fallen short and the only place to find grace and mercy with God is in Christ. He is the only one to have been tempted in all human ways and to have faced that force without sin. Being better than Hitler will not give us confidence to enter into God’s presence. It is impossible for anyone to climb the ladder of righteousness high enough to attain the standard necessary to impress God and be confident and comfortable in His presence. If it were possible, Jesus died for nothing as Paul says in Galatians 2:21.

In whatever way we’ve fallen short, Jesus fills that gap. He gives us whatever help we need to find confidence in the presence of God. However short our account is, Jesus makes the deposit required to satisfy any and all of God’s requirements for us. This is a free gift to all who will believe because God loves us all. That’s why He sent His son. God demonstrates His love for us on Calvary even in the presence of our sinfulness. God opened the heavens and declared “this is my beloved Son.” It’s in Christ we can truly experience God’s love. In commenting on this verse the Handbook for Translators observes, “In some languages, grace is a word little used outside church circles. If so, the translator may need to replace it by some such word as ‘love’ (See the German Common Language Bible)” The handbook even suggests incorporating that idea in the translation; “In fact, *find grace* is merely an equivalent of “experience kindness” or “experience love.” Accordingly, *we will receive mercy and find grace* may be restructured as “God will be kind to us and show us his love.”<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Paul Ellingworth and Eugene Albert Nida, [\*A Handbook on the Letter to the Hebrews\*](#), UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1994), 90–91.

### **The Wonderful Counselor! (Hebrews 5:1)**

The author of Hebrews has pointed out the superiority of Jesus over the prophets, the angels, Moses and the Law and now in chapter 5 he picks up the thought of the Levitical priesthood, especially the “high priest” who would intercede with God on behalf of the people with sin offerings. Again the writer is pointing out how Jesus is superior to everyone and everything else related to their former religion. Hebrews 5:1 says, “For every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins.” It appears that the point of this discussion is that the intercessor must come from the people. He must be one of them and it is God, Himself, who chooses the intercessor on the people’s behalf. The role of all the high priests throughout the history of Israel was to intercede with God with sacrifices and offerings to absolve the people from their sins.

The High Priest must be one of the people. The prophets spoke for God to the People. The angels were sent by God to serve the people. The Law of Moses was God’s speaking to the people. The High Priest was the one who spoke to God for the people. He had to be a man to do this. Jesus was fully human and indeed was one of us. The message from the people to God that the Priest would bring had to do with atonement for their sins. He brought sacrifices to God from the people that would establish a basis for forgiveness and restoration of a right standing before God. These rituals were repeated often whereas with Jesus, as we will read later, was accomplished for us once and for all. The gifts and sacrifices would never need to be offered again.

The many sacrifices of the Old Testament had interesting names; the guilt offering, the sin offering and the peace offering are just three of them. If you were to tell me “your sins are forgiven” would I then be able to walk away at peace with God, guilt free confident that all my sins are forgiven? It’s just not that easy, is it? I would still brew over my sin and struggle with doubt over my guilt and not fully experience peace with God. We sometimes need counseling to relieve the pain of our past. Stedman says that was the role of the priest. He writes, “But if we read Leviticus and Deuteronomy carefully, we will see that such priests served in the place of modern psychologists and psychiatrists today. In explaining to the people the purpose of each offering, they would be dealing with problems of fear, insecurity, anxiety, guilt and shame. Thus they fulfilled an extremely important role in the nation’s life.<sup>37</sup> It is the role of “counselor” that Jesus fills so perfectly in our lives. It’s one of his names according to Isaiah 9:6. We are often reminded at Christmas time that one of Jesus’ names is “wonderful Counselor.”

### **Jesus or Religion (Hebrews 5:2)**

The writer of Hebrews looks back at something he talked about earlier with a view toward clarification. In Hebrews 4 he mentioned that Jesus is not so distant from us that he can’t sympathize with our situation. He feels our struggles and our pain. He was fully human and could relate completely. Each High Priest had to be able to relate to the people, not only in their life struggles, but in their failures and sins. The high priest in Israel should be tender and gentle with sinners. Hebrews 5:2 says that because he is one of them, “He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness.” Of course this was not the case with the religious leaders in Jesus’ day. They insisted on stoning a woman found in adultery. They wanted to banish Jesus for violating the Sabbath and were always accusing Jesus and his

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<sup>37</sup> Ray C. Stedman, *Hebrews*, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Westmont, IL: IVP Academic, 1992), Heb 5:1.

followers for breaking their laws. When Jesus healed sinners the religious leaders had no compassion. They only looked at condemnation and judgment.

The Lawyers and Religious leaders did not deal “gently” with sinners. They were harsh and demanding on the people just as the Old Testament prophets predicted. Jeremiah spoke of the “shepherds” of Israel and said, “You have scattered my flock and have driven them away, and you have not attended to them. Behold, I will attend to you for your evil deeds, declares the LORD” (Jeremiah 23:2). Jesus confronted them because “They crush people with unbearable religious demands and never lift a finger to ease the burden” (Matthew 23:4).

Jesus’ strongest words were not to sinners but to the religious leaders of His day. He called them snakes, whitewashed tombs rotten on the inside, hypocrites, and only out for what they could get be it wealth or position. Yet, he was always trying to bring them to repentance. He wanted them to understand their own failures and sins so they could deal more compassionately with others. He told them the law against murder is violated by their own hatred. He said their lusting is a violation of the law against adultery. He called them to give up everything if they wanted to follow Him hoping it would open their eyes to their own sinfulness. What Jesus wanted them to give up wasn’t their wealth, position or privileges. He wanted them to give up their religion. But they couldn’t do it! It’s no different today. The hardest thing to give up for Jesus, and the only thing He really wants, is for us to give up our religion and trust completely in Him.

### **Jesus: The Only Pure Sacrifice (Hebrews 5:3)**

The subject of Hebrews chapter five is the superiority of Jesus’ priesthood over the Aaronic priesthood of the Old Testament. The chief priests of Israel were to deal “gently” with God’s people. That should not have been a problem for them because they were “one” of them. They were taken from among the people and shared all the same struggles as the people and what was even more important they were sinners just like the people they offered sacrifices for. Hebrews 5:3 says, “Because of this he is obligated to offer sacrifice for his own sins just as he does for those of the people.”

You would think that this would lead to a “gentle” approach to dealing with sinners being one yourself. I like the way Hughes put it, “When one is truly aware that he or she is a sinner, and couples this with the interior awareness of human weakness, this person will deal gently with others. Conversely, a harsh, judgmental, unsympathetic spirit is a telltale indication that one has outgrown his sense of weakness and awareness of sin. Many evangelicals fall to this syndrome after humbly coming to Christ at conversion, for their initial experience of sanctification deludes them into imagining they are better than others. Such arrogance, however, actually disqualifies them from spiritual ministry.”<sup>38</sup> This is an important observation because this became the fate of the Priests and religious leaders in Jesus day. They were able to blind themselves to their own sinfulness and focus their attention on demanding righteousness from others. Jesus often tried to bring the religious people to an understanding of their own sinfulness. It didn’t seem to work well.

Jesus, on the other hand, as Brown says, “...certainly did not need to offer a sacrifice for his own sins as the Old Testament priests did, but because he went through so much bitter and hostile

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<sup>38</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Hebrews: An Anchor for the Soul*, vol. 1, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1993), 138–139.

temptation, he can the more effectively meet our own deep spiritual needs.”<sup>39</sup> How can He be more effective than someone who sins in the same way as the people do? All the sacrifices offered at the hands of the Priests of Israel were offered by the hands of sinful people. Their hearts, as Jeremiah said, “were desperately wicked and deceitful above all things” (Jeremiah 17:9). All the sacrifices offered to God on behalf of the people were filtered through the sinful hands of the priests. No matter how accurate the offering was. No matter how sincere the sinner was in bringing his offering and no matter how sincere the priest was every sacrifice was filtered through sinful hands. Everyone offering of man is corrupt! But Jesus offering was pure in every way. There was no guile, no corruption, no deceit, nothing that defiled the offering. Jesus was both the sacrifice and the offeror! The sinfulness of the Priests simply made it impossible for them to offer a pure sacrifice! Listen, all the sacrifices you and I make are corrupt! They all pass through sinful hands and hearts! The only sacrifice worth putting your faith and confidence in is the one that Jesus made for you.

### **Letting Jesus be Jesus! (Hebrews 5:4)**

The “honor” of serving as a High Priest in Israel was something that no one could bestow upon himself. Aaron did not appoint himself. In Exodus 28:1, God calls Moses to bring Aaron and his sons to Him that He could appoint him as his sons as the priests of Israel. As it was God Himself that appointed Aaron, so too it was God Himself who appointed Jesus to His role as the Great High Priest for us all. Hebrews 5:4 says, “And no one takes this honor for himself, but only when called by God, just as Aaron was.” The writes of the Handbook for translators wants those who wrestle with this text in different languages to focus on the issue at hand and not be misled by the idea of the “call” itself. They say, “The wider context is concerned with valid appointment to the office of high priest, not so much with the call itself.”<sup>40</sup>

I can’t tell you how many sermons I’ve heard, books I’ve read and Christians I have talked to that try to take this passage and some others that are talking about the legitimacy of Christ’s call by God and apply it to a human “call to ministry.” That’s not what this passage is about. It’s not about me although I would like it to be sometimes. It’s about Jesus! So much of the Bible is taken out of context in order to make it mean something “to me” that the original point is missed altogether. The Bible is all about Jesus, it’s not about you! He’s the only one who can offer a perfect sacrifice for our sins. Only His righteousness is sufficient to meet the perfect demands of God. Jesus’ perfect life and perfect sacrifice on Calvary is what the Bible is all about. He’s the center of God’s message to man and it’s seen from Genesis through Revelation. He does for you and I what we could never do for ourselves. If you feel you have to add something to that through your own efforts, dedication and hard work, I feel sorry for you.

You and I were not appointed by God to save ourselves or others! We are not David going down to meet Goliath in the Valley of Elah! No! I am a frightened warrior standing with other frightened warriors needing a champion to fight for me. Jesus is that Champion. I am not Joshua (OT name for Jesus) wanting to stand against the giants in the land of Canaan. I am one of the other spies shaking in my boots at the size and demeanor of the enemy. I’m the one who needs a

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<sup>39</sup> Raymond Brown, *The Message of Hebrews: Christ above All*, The Bible Speaks Today (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 97–98.

<sup>40</sup> Paul Ellingworth and Eugene Albert Nida, *A Handbook on the Letter to the Hebrews*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1994), 96.

champion to take the land for me. Jesus is that Champion. We must stop seeing the Bible as just another self-help book to inspire us to take control of our lives; be like Daniel! Be like Joshua! Be like David! Be like Jesus! I am not Daniel. I am not Joshua. I am not David. I certainly am not Jesus. I want to let Jesus be Jesus! I want to be the sinner who is saved by God's grace through the only perfect life and sacrifice that could ever be made. It's not until we get over ourselves and let Jesus be our savior that we'll ever find true rest. Through faith in Christ, my Giant enemies have been conquered! He did it for me. He is the only legitimately appointed Messiah, Savior, of us all. We cannot save ourselves. We must let Jesus save us!

### **Listen to Jesus (Hebrews 5:5)**

In chapter 5 of the Epistle to the Hebrews, the writer is arguing for the superiority of Jesus as the great high priest over the high priests of Israel in Aaron's line. First it was noted that the high priests of Israel were sinners and had to offer sacrifices for their own sins before they could offer them for the nation's sins. This is not so with Jesus. All the sacrifices offered by man, any man, are tainted with sin. The only perfect, pure sacrifice was offered by Jesus on our behalf. Then the writer notes that priests are appointed by God and don't have the authority to appoint themselves. In Exodus 28 we see that God called for Aaron so that He could appoint him and his sons as priests for Israel. The calling is something God does and this is exactly what happened with Jesus. Hebrews 5:5 says, "So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him who said to him, 'You are my Son, today I have begotten you'".

The superiority of Christ's priesthood over the Aaronic Order was important for a couple of reasons. Furthermore, Jesus' role has nothing to do with his lineage. He's not of the line of Aaron therefore a direct commission from God had to be made and it was. He didn't inherit it as a child of Aaron but received it personally as a commission from God directly like Aaron himself did. But also the high priesthood had become a political office. It did not even directly follow in Aaron's line. Guzik observes this, "It is easy to see why the priesthood of Jesus was difficult for early Jewish Christians to grasp. Jesus was not from the lineage of Aaron. Jesus neither claimed nor practiced special ministry in the temple. He *confronted* the religious structure instead of *joining* it. In Jesus' day, the priesthood became a corrupt institution. The office was gained through intrigue and politicking among corrupt leaders."<sup>41</sup>

There were competing voices crying for their own right to be high priest! That's not the way Aaron was called to that office and it was not the way Jesus was called to His office. Many of the commentators argue that the "today I have begotten you" in this verse is of course a reference to Psalm 7. But the application of this to Jesus by the author of Hebrews is pointing toward the day of Jesus' resurrection from the dead. We'll see in Hebrews 5:9 that the day of Jesus appointment is referring to the day He was "Perfected." Pentecost says, "By quoting Psalm 2:7 he shows instead that, at the resurrection, Jesus Christ was *appointed* by His Father to the role of High Priest."<sup>42</sup> Pfeiffer observes, "Both at the baptism of Jesus and at the moment of His transfiguration the Father designated Jesus as the Son who was to be heard and obeyed."<sup>43</sup> The

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<sup>41</sup> David Guzik, [Hebrews](#), David Guzik's Commentaries on the Bible (Santa Barbara, CA: David Guzik, 2013), Heb 5:5–6.

<sup>42</sup> J. Dwight Pentecost and Ken Durham, [Faith That Endures: A Practical Commentary on the Book of Hebrews](#), Rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2000), 94.

<sup>43</sup> Charles F. Pfeiffer, [The Epistle to the Hebrews](#), Everyman's Bible Commentary (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1962), 44.

obvious superiority of Jesus over prophets, Moses, Angels, and the Priests of Israel should make it clear who we should listen to. It's all about Him! He interprets the Bible for us! He informed us on several occasions that it was all about Him. Focus your attention and look for and listen to Jesus.

### **Proclaim Jesus! (Hebrews 5:6)**

The author of Hebrews isn't through arguing for the Superiority of Jesus as the intercessor on our behalf over the priesthood of Israel. Like Aaron, Jesus was appointed directly from God. Unlike the corrupt priesthood in the day that was purchased or gained through political intrigue, Jesus was twice identified in His life personally by God as the appointed intercessor for all mankind. He was superior because he was one of the people, human, himself but without sin. His sacrifice did not pass through the sinful hands of any man. God directly appointed Him and then established Him as the High Priest for all mankind through the resurrection from the dead. But there was more evidence to support Jesus' superiority. Hebrews 5:6 says, "As he says also in another place, 'You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek.'"

Mentioning Melchizedek is a reference back to the days of Abraham. Pfeiffer explains the significance of this. He says, "This provides the key to the contention that the priesthood of Christ is superior to that of Aaron and his descendants. Although all priests in Israel had to be of the Aaronic line, the Law itself spoke of a pre-Aaronic priest who was recognized by no less a personage than Abraham. Melchizedek had been the priest-king of the city-state of Jerusalem (Salem) at the time Abraham had rescued Lot from his captors. Subsequently the Psalmist spoke of an ideal and everlasting priestly line after the order of Melchizedek."<sup>44</sup> It seems that the mention of Melchizedek is saying that Jesus was of an order that pre-dates Aaron. He is superior because He was priest long before Aaron even existed. Jesus' order is affirmed by Abraham, the father of the whole nation, and therefore is superior.

But it's not only that the Order of Melchizedek, of which Jesus belonged, is much older than the Priests of Aaron's line, it is an order that will last forever and ever and ever, Hallelujah! The quote from Psalm 110 is a key passage for understanding much of what is to follow in the book of Hebrews. But it seems to me that purpose of it begins in this verse by pointing out that Jesus' divine appointment predates Aarons and will outlast Aarons. Further it is an uncorrupted priesthood unlike that of Aarons. The priests cannot offer an acceptable sacrifice for our sins. They cannot intercede for us. Neither can the Prophets, the Angels and Moses himself is incapable of mediating a relationship with God. Only Jesus can do that. Paul encourages the young preacher, Timothy, to set aside his interests in the law and efforts at measuring up to God's standards. He wants Timothy to focus on what matters. He says, in 1 Timothy 2:3f that God... "desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." What is that truth Paul? Verse 5 tells us, "For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all." Paul goes on to tell Timothy, "For this I was appointed a preacher and an apostle." Preachers should preach "Jesus."

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<sup>44</sup> Charles F. Pfeiffer, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Everyman's Bible Commentary (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1962), 44.

### **Jesus is The Priority! (Hebrews 5:7)**

Jesus, as a priest of the order of Melchizedek, was of an older priesthood affirmed by the Father of the faithful, Himself, Abraham. The Messiah, the Christ, existed in eternity past with the Father in all His divine glory was to serve as priest and king for all mankind forever and ever. His reign will have not end! Now to further his argument that Jesus' is the only acceptable intermediary for us, the author of Hebrews turns to the days of Jesus' incarnation. Hebrews 5:7 says, "In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence." The writer is going to focus on Jesus' superiority in all things and His worthiness of our entire attention. The God man, the Messiah was actually born into the family of man in order to become our fully sufficient sacrifice. He felt our pains and cried out to God for deliverance and was answered.

This is one verse that might sway me toward seeing Paul as the writer of Hebrews. I don't believe he was, but the similarity between this verse and Paul's words in Philippians 2:6-11 strike me. Paul wrote about Jesus saying, "Though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

With great tears Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane. God heard that prayer! In his humble submission to death, that was the Father's will for His son in order to save us all, He was raised from the dead and elevated to the highest possible position. Jesus is so far about the Prophets, the angels, the priests and even Moses that it's at His name, and only at His name, will every knee bow and worship. Jesus deserves and yes, demands, all our attention. Paul tells the Colossians, "He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent" (Colossians 1:18). Unfortunately we focus way too much attention on our own efforts, our works of righteousness that don't matter at all except being as filthy rags, rather than putting Christ ahead of everything. Let Him be preeminent in our lives; thinking, living and preaching! He is the only one who deserves it and demands it.

### **Focus on Jesus (Hebrews 5:8)**

When the author of Hebrews mentions the prayer of Jesus that was answered by God he is referring to the passionate prayer in the garden of Gethsemane. It appears that Jesus prayed that God would deliver him from the death that faced him. But if the prayer was answered by God as the writer asserts, it must have been a prayer to be delivered, not from this death, but through this death. Piper suggests that it's a prayer to "hang in there" through the excruciating ordeal He was about to undergo. That is exactly what happened. He was successful through His trials and as Pfeiffer observes, "Jesus overcame the power of death. Jesus tasted death, but in so doing He opened the vistas of endless life for His people. The temptation of Jesus 'in all points' included the issues of death, but He accepted the Father's will and 'for the joy ... set before him' endured

its agonies.”<sup>45</sup> But then comes Hebrews 5:8 which says, “Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered.”

I’m alarmed at how many commentators want to make this comment about us. You see, we learn obedience through suffering for sure. It would be clearer to say that we learn obedience through disobedience. But not Jesus! He was obedient from beginning to end! When I commented on Hebrews 5:7 I referred to Philippians 2:6-11. I’m still convinced that these verses are parallel ideas to Hebrews 5:7-8. You see, Jesus wasn’t an ordinary priest or even an ordinary son. He was “the” son of God and could have bypassed the pains and sufferings of the cross if he had so chose. That was even the temptation used by Satan in the wilderness. It was what Satan tried again using Peter to dissuade Jesus from completing his mission. No way! Jesus would have none of it and I think Hebrews 5:8 is saying something to the effect of Philippians 2:8 “he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” He was obedient up to and including death!

Jesus is so much more important than the priests of the Old Testament because he was not only intercessor bringing sacrifices for the sins of the people; he was also the sacrifice itself. He was the perfectly obedient Son of God who had no need to offer sacrifices for himself like the priests did. The sacrifices for sin offered by priests had to pass through sinful, human hands! The sacrifice Jesus brought was perfect in every respect and was presented to God as payment for our sins through the only perfectly obedient intercessor. Not even the death on the cross deterred Jesus from becoming the perfect High Priest for us all. Jesus did not experience disobedience but he suffered the consequences of our disobedience to the fullest extent possible; even death on the cross. No knees are going to bow to the Angels. They bow to Jesus. No souls will be saved through the Laws of Moses and no sacrifice offered by sinful human priests will make peace with God on our behalf. He is the one and only! Several times already he has instructed his readers to keep their eyes on Jesus. In Hebrews 12:2 he says again, “Look to Jesus” and then again in Hebrews 12:3, “consider him...” Like Peter on the water, we must keep our eyes on Jesus! As soon as we take them off of him and focus on ourselves we will sink.

### **Obey the Law or believe in Jesus? (Hebrews 5:9-10)**

Hebrews 12:2 tells we should be “...looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.” This verse speaks of the “founder” of our faith as well as the “perfecter” of our faith. Hebrews 5:9-10 looks at the “foundation” of our faith; our eternal salvation. It says, “And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek.” Jesus was perfected, not morally, but essentially at his resurrection where he took on a resurrected body and now sits next to God the Father where he can be our effectual High Priest and intercede for us with the Father.

Hebrews chapter seven is all about how much greater Melchizedek is as a Priest than those of Aaron’s line who offered sacrifices for the people. The focus will be on the fact that Melchizedek has no beginning and no ending and that’s why Jesus was appointed as Priest of that order rather than of Aaron’s order. The resurrection clarifies the eternal nature of Jesus’ role in heaven seated with the Father. The habitual practice of the “Hebrews” of offering blood

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<sup>45</sup> Charles F. Pfeiffer, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Everyman’s Bible Commentary (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1962), 45.

sacrifices was deeply seated in their lives and it was extremely hard for them to let go of those religious practices as the basis of having their sins forgiven by God. Many of us today have been raised under strict religious regimes and have a hard time feeling at peace with God when we don't live up to those standards. Like the Hebrews we continue with our religious rituals "just in case" Jesus is not enough. We feel guilty if we don't perform. We feel less "saved" if we don't observe the traditional routines. By focusing on the superiority of Jesus and the fact that he is "the source of our eternal salvation," the writer of Hebrews is pointing out verse after verse, chapter after chapter the full sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice and intercession on our behalf.

According to Ray Brown, Jesus is the source of "eternal salvation" only to those who "obey him." He understands "obey" to mean keeping the Law because he says that eternal salvation is achieved "...only by a lifetime of constantly renewed dedication and obedient responsiveness to all that God requires of his people."<sup>46</sup> Nothing is more destructive to our peace with God than teaching like this. God calls us to perfection under the law! Paul tells us that the standard required is impossible for anyone to attain! The Gospel itself is the call that Jesus accomplished for us, what we could not do for ourselves. He was perfect and "perfected" for us all. Don't put your faith and confidence in your strength to live up to the standards of the law! You'll constantly fail. Instead, believe the Gospel. Jesus' perfection is ours by faith. Pfeiffer says that the obedience referenced in this passage is "an obedience of faith." He writes, "Jesus was obedient to the Father. Now He seeks the obedience of faith of all who would share His blessings. Faith may be regarded as the response of obedience to the preaching of the message of redemption in Christ."<sup>47</sup>

### **Jesus is God's message (Hebrews 5:11)**

The superiority of Christ to the prophets, angels, Moses, the Law itself, and the priests of Aaron's line, and everything else as well has been the subject of the epistle to the Hebrews since the opening verse. Don't attach Hebrews 5:11 with the short dependent clause of verse 10 "to those who obey him." Many people will argue that "eternal salvation" is at stake and the writer wants to speak more about the call on us for righteous living rather than the call on us to trust Christ for everything. Hebrews 5:11 says, "About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing." The coming exhortations which have caused so much confusion are not about living a more moral lifestyle but about living a more faith filled lifestyle. Jesus is better than anything you can imagine. Put your faith in him and only in him. The Handbook for Translators talks about the title heading for the next few verses and it rightly captures this theme. It says, "The section heading *Warning against Abandoning the Faith* may be expressed as an imperative; for example, "Do not give up trusting in Christ" or "Do not cease believing in Christ."<sup>48</sup>

What's at stake is not our eternal salvation in the upcoming warning passage, but the loss of "rest" that comes from trusting in the full sufficiency of Christ. When he has a lot to say is not

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<sup>46</sup> Raymond Brown, *The Message of Hebrews: Christ above All*, The Bible Speaks Today (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 102.

<sup>47</sup> Charles F. Pfeiffer, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Everyman's Bible Commentary (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1962), 46.

<sup>48</sup> Paul Ellingworth and Eugene Albert Nida, *A Handbook on the Letter to the Hebrews*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1994), 102.

exhortation to keep the law but true spiritual growth through understanding all the wonderful mysteries of Jesus as revealed to us in the whole Bible. He is found in it from Genesis through Revelation. He explained how the Old Testament was about Himself to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. Then he opened their eyes to see him for who he was. When he spoke with the religious leaders he reminded them that they search the scriptures because they think they have eternal life in them but then adds that the whole Old Testament is about himself. But the religious leaders were blinded to that truth. They could not see it. Very often Jesus spoke of those who “had ears but couldn’t hear or eyes but couldn’t see.” Their religion has blinded them to the truth of Jesus as the subject of God’s entire revelation to man. Even today religious rituals, rules and regulations blind people to Jesus. It’s easier to focus on our own righteousness than to trust in Jesus’ righteousness. We make the Old Testament stories into examples for us to follow rather than revelations of Jesus. We reduce Christianity to another self-help book while we focus our attention on ourselves rather than Jesus.

What the author of Hebrews has a lot to talk about is Jesus. He’s already proven that in the first five chapters. He’s quoted numerous times from the Old Testament to show that it’s pointing to Jesus. He adds that this is hard to explain and takes real maturity to understand. Jesus is the subject of the Bible! So he brings up an obscure reference to a priest in the book of Genesis that Abraham gave a tithe to and explains how that story is really about Jesus. Jesus is the one who fulfills the priestly as well as the kingly line of Melchizedek. Melchizedek makes intercession to God for Abraham and the people. Jesus makes intercession on behalf of all mankind. Melchizedek is the king of Salem (Peace!). But Jesus fulfills that role totally! He is the “prince of peace” (Isaiah 9:6). After explaining the parable of the soils in which the seed is the “word” of God, he says in Luke 8:18, “take care then how you hear.”

### **Jesus is the Oracle of God (Hebrews 5:12a)**

The writer of Hebrews wanted to teach his readers some mature doctrines relating to the Old Testament character Melchizedek. He had a lot to say about it but hesitated because he said in Hebrews 5:11 that his readers were dull or slow of hearing. Jesus used a similar phrase in his rebuke of a couple of disciples. They too were dull or slow of hearing and believing. In Luke 24:25-27, Jesus speaks to the two men on the road to Emmaus, “And he said to them, ‘O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory? And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.’”

The point of the author’s rebuke of the Hebrews as well as Jesus’ rebuke of the two travelers is that they didn’t understand that the Old Testament was a progressive revelation of God’s salvation of mankind through the promised seed of the woman mentioned in Genesis 3:15. Actually “dull” hearts and minds are what Jesus used to refer to those who did not get or believe in who he was and what he as the promised Messiah was to accomplish on behalf of those who would believe in him. The dull hearts, deaf ears and blind eyes all refer to the comprehension of Christ and his complete fulfillment of the Old Testament and his complete sufficiency to save us from our sins. Jesus mentions this in Matthew 13:15. He says, “For this people’s heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.”

The writer of Hebrews wants his readers to mature in their grasp of the truths of Jesus as seen in the Scriptures from beginning to end. He wants them to see, hear and understand how Jesus is

the fulfillment of the Old Testament. He frequently challenges them to “consider” or to “think about” or to “reflect on” Jesus. This is what will mature them and enable them to become teachers of Jesus as well. But their dull hearts and minds have lulled them into a lethargic stupor regarding the things of Christ and allowed them to drift back into a religion of works. Hebrews 5:12a says, “For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God.” What does the writer mean by “the basic principles of the oracles of God?” Hagner correctly understands this. He writes, “This probably refers to the basics of the Christian gospel, but as contained in the OT. If the readers still need elementary Christian exegesis of the OT, how will they move to such exegesis at the more advanced level?”<sup>49</sup> Jesus is the oracle of God.

### **Jesus is our Righteousness! (Hebrews 5:12b-13)**

Jesus interpreted the whole Old Testament as a commentary on himself to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. The writer of Hebrews begins his letter and keeps it going with the same effort; Jesus is the revelation of the Bible from Genesis to the end. He quotes the Old Testament over and over again and interprets it christologically. He points out how it’s really about Christ. Some passages he uses are relatively obvious. But when he gets to Genesis 14 and the story of Abraham’s encounter with Melchizedek he realizes that this is not easy to understand. Understanding Jesus from Melchizedek is difficult to digest. So in Hebrews 5:12b-13 he says, “You need milk, not solid food, for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child.”

They should be teachers but they haven’t matured. What should they be teaching? They should be teaching as Jesus did to the two disciples on the road of Emmaus and what the writer of Hebrews demonstrates for them. They should be interpreting the Old Testament christologically, that is, as it pertains to Jesus of Nazareth who is the Messiah. This is what the author of Hebrews has been doing all along and this is what Christian expositors of the Bible should do as well. If it’s “Christian” it must be about Christ or better, Jesus is the Christ. The writer moves on from the milk of the Psalms and other obvious passages about the Messiah and reaches back to Genesis 14 and the story of Melchizedek. But that’s solid food. They are not ready for that yet because of their immaturity. He argues that just drinking the milk, although nourishing when you’re a child, will not foster true maturity. Milk keeps one “unskilled in the word of righteousness.”

Commentators are divided over what “the word of righteousness” means. Some suggest it is referring to our own personal righteousness. But the Bible makes it clear (Isaiah 64:6) that all of “our righteous deeds are as filthy rags” to God. The New Testament (Romans 3:10) says “there is none righteous no not one!” Paul tells the Philippians that he’s not trusting in his own personal righteousness but in Jesus. He writes in Philippians 3:9, “...not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith.” Jesus is the “word” of righteousness. Jeremiah actually told the

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<sup>49</sup> Donald A. Hagner, *Hebrews*, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 86.

sinful nation that righteousness would be theirs but not through good works. Jeremiah 33:15-16 says, “In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David, and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In those days Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will dwell securely. And this is the name by which it will be called: ‘The LORD is our righteousness.’”

### **Jesus is our Solid Food (Hebrews 5:14)**

Jesus held up a loaf of bread in the upper room before his death and challenged his followers to do this in remembrance of him. The bread represents his body. The wine represents his blood. Jesus died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins and to purchase for us a place in heaven which he offers as a free gift which can only be received by grace through faith. It’s not by works and especially not by works of the Jewish laws lest anyone should have reason to boast. This is true solid food! This is what Jesus called Peter to feed his sheep. This is what Jesus’ wants modern preachers and teachers to feed his sheep. This is perfectly clear from Jesus’ own words recorded in John 6:54-58. Jesus says, “Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like the bread the fathers ate, and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.”

In Hebrews 5:14 the writer begins a discussion about solid food. He says, “But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.” Hagner rightly recognizes what the writer of Hebrews means by solid food. He writes, “**Solid food** is what the author is presenting in this epistle, and in this particular context it is the argument about Melchizedek.”<sup>50</sup> But Hagner doesn’t note that according to Hebrews Jesus is the fulfillment of Melchizedek. Melchizedek is just a picture of the true “King of righteousness” (that’s what the name Melchizedek literally means). The writer will get back to the solid food of Melchizedek as the picture of Jesus in Chapter 7.

But then what does it mean to have our “powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil?” I’m convinced that “good and evil” has nothing to do with moral issues at all but rather with being able by training and through practice to discern between good teaching and poor bible teaching. Guzik gets this. In his commentary he says, “Not moral good and evil, but wholesome and corrupt doctrine. The implication is that the readers’ condition is such as to prevent them from making this distinction.”<sup>51</sup> When you grasp that solid food is always about Jesus and the Gospel you have a basis of evaluating teaching and preaching as well as writing. If it’s about Jesus it is solid food. If it’s about you it is not solid food. It’s just another pep-talk, or self-help instruction, or even a religious requirement to shame you to change your ways. Solid food, the real meat of Christianity is always about Jesus!

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<sup>50</sup> Donald A. Hagner, [Hebrews](#), Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 86.

<sup>51</sup> David Guzik, [Hebrews](#), David Guzik’s Commentaries on the Bible (Santa Barbara, CA: David Guzik, 2013), Heb 5:12b–14.

### **Jesus is milk and meat! (Hebrews 6:1)**

Hebrews 6:1 begins with a “therefore.” That always requires that we understand what the “therefore” is there for. What is the connection between what he is about to say with what he has already said? He’s argued that Jesus is the absolute best thing from God. He’s better than the prophets, the angels, the law, Moses and the priesthood of Aaron’s line. When he speaks of the priesthood of Jesus he identifies Jesus as a priest in the order of Melchizedek not Aaron. Then stops and says this is really difficult to understand and is intended for the mature believer. He is concerned because his readers are only accustomed to the Jesus milk and needed to grow up in order to be able to digest the Jesus meat. Jesus milk is nourishing for infants but adults need more than that. Melchizedek is going to be meaty and the writer is going to go back to that discussion in Chapter 7 but not until he deals with the difference between Jesus milk and Jesus meat. Hebrews 6:1 says, “Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God.”

Don’t think that “the elementary doctrine of Christ” is something to be discarded! It’s actually the foundation of everything. It’s something that’s built upon and which holds the superstructure together. Jesus speaks of the difference between those who build on a solid foundation and those who build on sand. Houses built on sand collapse, not those built on the solid foundation. Paul makes sure we know what our foundation is and the writer of Hebrews knows this also. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 3:11, “For no one is able to lay another foundation than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.” This foundation was spoken of by Isaiah years before. He speaks for God and says in Isaiah 28:16 “Look! I am placing a foundation stone in Jerusalem, a firm and tested stone. It is a precious cornerstone that is safe to build on. Whoever believes need never be shaken.”

“Dead works” refers to a foundation of sand! It’s never going to be secure! A relationship with God based on my performance and my works of righteousness is always going to fall short. I’ll never quite be good enough. But faith in Jesus who is perfect is a solid foundation upon which we can build confidently and securely. This is Jesus milk. Every understanding of the Old Testament must be founded on this truth. The writer of Hebrews directs our attention to the Old Testament prophets, priests, laws and everything else as further nourishment for Christians. Drawing out the nutrients of Christ as seen in every verse is our solid food and our solid foundation. He will cut up the meat of Melchizedek for us in Chapter 7 and even go on later in his letter to dish up more meat of salvation by grace through faith alone by pointing out the foundational truth of Christ in all the key figures in the Old Testament. In Chapter 11 the writer will begin his long review of the key characters in the Bible explaining that it was faith not works that declared them righteous. In Hebrews 11:4 he talks about Able and says, “By an act of faith, Abel brought a better sacrifice to God than Cain. It was what he believed, not what he brought, that made the difference. That’s what God noticed and approved as righteous” (The Message).

### **Jesus cleanses us from all sin! (Hebrews 6:2)**

Hebrews 6:2 continues from verse 1 naming the foundational teachings of Christ upon which the superstructure of the faith must be built. Hebrews 6:1-2 says, “Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.” The first foundational issue is that we

repent of our confidence in our works and rest confidently in Christ's work for us on the cross. It's easy to see why the writer would include this as the first foundational issue. The second issue deals with 2 other items that could be connected to the idea of dead works. One commentary said, "**Dead works** may represent the efforts connected with the earthly sanctuary system to secure cleansing and acceptance before God."<sup>52</sup> The instructions about washings and laying on of hands deal with offering sacrifices under the Old Testament economy. It has to do with the purification of sinners through blood sacrifices.

It's faith in God and the sacrifice offered by Jesus on the cross of Calvary that replaces all that. It's foundational to our faith to see that there need not be any more blood sacrifices for the forgiveness of sins. That's been taken care of! It's foundational! The author of Hebrews will make this all perfectly clear in Chapter 9, verses 13-14, when he writes, "For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God."

"Laying on of hands" is another ritual of the Jewish religious system. Another commentary explains, "The rite symbolized transfer. On the Day of Atonement hands were placed on the head of a goat as the priest confessed the sins of Israel (Lev. 16:21). Then the goat was sent away into the wilderness where he typically carried the sins which he bore, never to return with them again."<sup>53</sup> The foundational issues associated with washings and laying on of hands as practiced in the Old Testament have been fulfilled in Christ. Like salvation by grace through faith alone the sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice on the cross for our sins is foundational. Your sins have been atoned for and taken away as far as the east is from the west to never return. If you don't grasp this truth, you'll not understand Jesus meat! He says (John 6:55-56), "My body is real food. My blood is real drink. 56Anyone who eats my body and drinks my blood remains in me. And I remain in him."

### **Jesus is the Resurrection (Hebrews 6:1-2)**

Jesus is both milk and meat! He nourishes the infants and he nourishes the adults. He is all the nourishment believers need. But if children don't digest the Jesus milk, they'll never be able to handle the Jesus meat. The author of Hebrews seems to say that Jesus milk is foundational. If you don't get that, digest that, you'll never be able to digest the meat. In Hebrews 6:1-2 the writer says, "Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment." The first foundational principle of Christ that must be laid deals with the issue of salvation by grace by faith instead of by dead works of the law. If that's not the basis of your understanding of the whole Bible, you don't understand the whole Bible.

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<sup>52</sup> J. Paul Tanner, "[The Epistle to the Hebrews](#)," in *The Grace New Testament Commentary*, ed. Robert N. Wilkin (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2010), 1052.

<sup>53</sup> Charles F. Pfeiffer, [The Epistle to the Hebrews](#), Everyman's Bible Commentary (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1962), 50.

The second foundational principle deals with Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross as payment for our sins. It was in my stead that Jesus died and for my sins that Jesus died. As the author said earlier and will say again later Jesus had no sin for which he needed to offer a sacrifice as the Priests of Aaron's line did. If the washings of purification made people acceptable to God how much more acceptable will we be who are purified by the cleaning blood of Jesus? As the priest laid his hands on the sacrifice transferring the sins of the people onto the sacrifice and sent it into the wilderness never to return. Salvation is by God's grace through faith in Jesus! This is foundational. We are cleansed from our sins by his sacrifice! This is foundational. If you don't build all your thinking around these two truths you'll never understand God.

But there is another foundational issue the author mentions in the last part of verse 2. It concerns "...the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment." The resurrection is an essential and foundational doctrine of the faith. Whether these doctrines were part of Old Testament theology or not it must be recognized as Hughes observes, "But in the New Testament these subjects take on massive significance, with Jesus Christ at their very center." This foundational doctrine came directly from the mouth of Jesus in John's Gospel 11:25-26. He said, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" Further, 1 Thessalonians 1:10 puts the two, resurrection and judgment into the hands of Jesus. It commend the believers who, "...are looking forward to the coming of God's Son from heaven—Jesus, whom God raised from the dead. He is the one who has rescued us from the terrors of the coming judgment." These are foundational! We are saved by grace through faith alone in Jesus. Jesus paid our debt and cleansed us from our sins. Jesus resurrection guarantees God's acceptance of us in the future kingdom. It's all about Jesus! If you don't get these, you won't get the Bible.