



Talmid תלמיד a Hebrew word that means “a true disciple who desires to be what the Rabbi Jesus is.”
Whoever claims to live in Him must walk as Jesus did. 1 John 2:6 (NIV)

STUDY TO SHEW THYSELF APPROVED UNTO GOD, A WORKMAN THAT NEEDETH NOT TO BE ASHAMED, RIGHTLY DIVIDING THE WORD OF TRUTH. 2 TIMOTHY 2:15



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The Doctrines of Grace

Christ's Purposeful Atonement (Part-8) *(Continuation from last month)*

5. The Spirit's Effective Call

The concept of irresistible grace, the **I** in **TULIP**, is closely linked to the doctrines of regeneration and effectual calling.

When John H. Gerstner was a college

student, he took a course in theology from John Orr, one of the nation's most learned and distinguished scholars in the early twentieth century. During one lecture Orr wrote on the blackboard in large letters: Regeneration precedes faith. These words stunned Gerstner. He was sure his professor had made a mistake and unintentionally reversed the order of the words. **Did not every Christian know that faith is a necessary prerequisite for regeneration, that one must believe in Christ to be born again?**

This was John Gerstner's virgin exposure to Reformed theology, and it startled him. That regeneration comes before faith, not after it or as a result of it, was an idea he had never considered. Once he heard his professor's cogent argument, Gerstner was convinced and his life was set on an entirely different course.

Table 7

The Tulip's Fourth Petal

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|--------------------------------------|---|
| 1. Total depravity | Humanity's radical corruption |
| 2. Unconditional election | God's sovereign choice |
| 3. Limited atonement | Christ's purposeful atonement |
| 4. Irresistible grace | The Spirit's effective call |
| 5. Perseverance of the saints | God's preservation of the saints |

EFFECTUAL CALLING

The Westminster Confession of Faith devotes an entire chapter to the doctrine of effectual calling. It begins by declaring:

“All those whom God has predestined unto life, and those only, He is pleased, in His appointed and accepted time, effectually to call, by His Word and Spirit, out of that state of sin and death, in which they are by nature to grace and salvation, by Jesus Christ; enlightening their minds spiritually and savingly to understand the things of God, taking away their heart of stone, and giving unto them an heart of flesh; renewing their wills, and, by His almighty power, determining them to that which is good, and effectually drawing them to Jesus Christ: yet so, as they come most freely, being made willing by His grace.”

Effectual calling is effectual *because in it and by it God effects exactly what he intends in the operation*: the quickening of spiritually dead souls to spiritual life.

Calling refers to the Holy Spirit’s inward or secret operation on the soul. The confession’s metaphor of turning a heart of stone into a heart of flesh is drawn directly from Scripture. The image may be a bit confusing because of the positive reference to the word **flesh**.

In the Bible **flesh** usually refers to our fallen nature, which stands in contrast with and in opposition to the Spirit. **In this image, however, flesh is not contrasted with spirit but with a stone.** The same point is in view in both sets of images, namely a transformation from death to life. Apart from the grace of regeneration, the person’s heart or soul is, with respect to the things of God, like a stone. It is inert, unfeeling, unresponsive. It is reified and calcified. It is called stony because it is morally hard. The heart of stone is also a heart of darkness, lacking both life and light.

The grace of regeneration changes the heart or soul from something **cold**, **lifeless**, and **stony** into something **living**, **pulsating**, **sanguine**, and **responsive**. The heart is **“made alive”** to the things of God.

Calvin quotes **Augustine** as saying: **“This grace, which is secretly imparted to the hearts of men, is not received by any hard heart; for the reason for which it is given is, that the hardness of the heart may first be taken away. Hence, when the Father is heard within, he takes away the stony heart, and gives a heart of flesh. Thus he makes them sons of promise and vessels of mercy, which he has prepared for glory.”**

God’s call is made effectual by the Word and the Spirit. It is important to see that Word and Spirit are here conjoined as two vital factors in regeneration. ***The Holy Spirit is not working apart from the Word or against the Word, but with the Word. Nor is the Word working alone without the presence and power of the Spirit.***

The call referred to in effectual calling is not the outward call of the gospel that can be heard by anyone within range of the preaching. **The call referred to here is the inward call**, the call that penetrates to and pierces the heart, quickening it to spiritual life. Hearing the gospel enlightens the mind, yet it does not awaken the soul until the Holy Spirit illumines and regenerates it. **The move from ear to soul is made by the Holy Spirit.** This move is what accomplishes God’s purpose of applying the benefits of Christ’s work to the elect.

The Westminster Confession speaks of the Spirit’s renewing the will and of determining it to what is good by His almighty power. This refers to the omnipotence of God. Far from a mere enticement, God’s effectual call on the human soul derives from the power source of omnipotence. ***The same power that called the world into existence out of nothing is now exercised in our redemption. As God calls the world into being out of nothing, so he calls us to saving faith out of “nothing,”*** calling us who have no spiritual virtue whatever.

The confession speaks of God’s determination. This is not to be confused with the blind determinism of fate or of mechanical physical forces. This is the determination of an omnipotent and holy Being, who is determined to bring about the salvation of His elect. God is determined to accomplish His plan, and by His determinate counsel that is exactly what He does.

In the phrase **effectual calling**, the stress is on the

word *effectual*. The confession speaks of God's drawing the sinner to Christ, borrowing the word *draw* from Scripture but qualifying it with the adverb *effectually*. *The Holy Spirit's drawing is effectual; it accomplishes its purpose.*

The effect of this inward calling on the sinner is real. Regeneration and effectual calling effect a real change in the person. He is not merely induced to a particular action that he otherwise might not take. **Regeneration produces a real and substantive change in the person's constituent nature.** His will is renewed and liberated. He is freed from the bondage of original sin. He receives a new disposition for the things of God. Saving faith is worked in the heart. *As a result of regeneration, the person becomes a new creature.*

REGENERATION AND DISPENSATIONALISM

Let me quote R.C. Sproul in this section:

"Shortly after the publication of John H. Gerstner's book *Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth*, I received inquiries from Dispensational friends who were disturbed by the sharpness of his critique and by his charge that Dispensational theology is "dubious" evangelicalism. Gerstner labored to show that the alleged Calvinism of Dispensationalism is spurious.

He hammered away at the **inherent antinomianism** built into the **Dispensational view of grace and law**. He stressed the deficiencies in **Dispensationalism's doctrine of sanctification**, which has engendered so much controversy with respect to the Lordship of Christ. I had written the foreword to Gerstner's book, and this seemed to cause my friends more distress than the book itself.

A friend who teaches at Dallas Theological Seminary called me by phone and asked in a most gracious, earnest manner what I think is the *most serious issue dividing Dispensationalism and Reformed theology*. I answered that the most significant difference, at least in the long run because of its impact on theology as a whole, may be the different views of regeneration. **According to Dispensationalism when the Holy Spirit regenerates a person, nothing really happens to effect change in the**

person's constituent nature."

In the Dispensational view, the Holy Spirit indwells the believer but may or may not change the believer's nature. The believer must cooperate with the indwelling Spirit to effect the changes that should accompany sanctification.

This makes it possible for the believer to be in a state of grace and remain a "carnal Christian," **one who receives Jesus as Savior but not as Lord**. Though the believer *should* embrace Christ as both Savior and Lord, it is possible for the believer to submit to Christ only as Savior.

There is an intramural debate among Dispensationalists on this point. Some argue that the believer will inevitably submit to Christ as Lord, but not necessarily immediately. The person may, at least for a time, remain carnal. They appeal to the New Testament, in which Paul calls himself carnal and believers are sometimes addressed as "carnal." To be carnal is to be "fleshy," to act according to the old nature and not the new nature.

The issue is not whether Christians sin or at times act in a carnal manner. **The issue is whether one can be completely carnal and be regenerate at the same time.** **Some Dispensationalists believe that** one can be completely carnal and still be a Christian. *This presupposes that regeneration does not* necessarily involve a change in the person's constituent nature. Something is added to the human nature, namely the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. But the Spirit may cohabit with the sinner and never change his nature. The sinner may continue to be utterly carnal, with his personal nature unchanged.

The Reformed objection to Dispensationalism's carnal-Christian theory is based on the **Reformed doctrine of regeneration**. What is generated anew is the person's nature. The heart of the sinner is truly changed. Once in bondage to sin, the sinner is now liberated unto newness of life. The fruit of obedience is both inevitable and necessary; it is immediate. Obedience is by no means perfect, nor does it in any way contribute to the ground of one's justification. Its absence, however, points to the absence of regeneration. A totally carnal person is an unregenerate person, and an unregenerate person is an unsaved person.

Often lurking in the background of this dispute is a **semi-Pelagian view of salvation**. Though **Dispensationalists** claim to be “**four-point Calvinists**,” some reject, in addition to the **L** of **TULIP**, the **I**.

Let us look briefly at the teaching of **Dispensationalist Zane C. Hodges**, who has been at the center of the Lordship-salvation controversy. **Hodges** writes in his book ***Absolutely Free***: “It is the consistent testimony of the New Testament Scriptures that God’s Word in the gospel is what produces the miracle of regeneration. It—and it alone—is the powerful, life-giving seed which takes root in the human heart when that Word is received there in faith.”

Hodges makes it clear that regeneration is a miracle. It is accomplished by the power of God, not by human strength. The question is, however, when does this miracle take place? According to Hodges it occurs *when the Word is received in faith. Faith precedes regeneration and is the necessary condition for it.* This places Hodges squarely in the **semi-Pelagian camp**.

Later **Hodges** says: “And what happens to those who appropriate that water [“the water of life”]? What happens to those who believe this invitation [“**Let him take the water of life freely**” (**Revelation 22:17**)]?”

Revelation 22:17 (NASB)

¹⁷ **The Spirit and the bride say, “Come.” And let the one who hears say, “Come.” And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost.**

A *miracle* happens to them. They are born again. New life is imparted to them. And in the possession of that life, they possess also God’s Son (**1 John 5:12**).

1 John 5:12 (NASB)

¹² **He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life.**

Indeed, *He is that life* (**1 John 5:20c**), and thus He Himself lives within them (**Colossians 1:27**).”

1 John 5:20 (NASB)

²⁰ **And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding so that**

we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.

Colossians 1:27 (NASB)

²⁷ **to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.**

Hodges summarizes his view:

“What really happens when a person believes the saving Word of the gospel? There are numerous answers to this question.... But at least two things are so utterly fundamental that they must never be forgotten.

One is that a miraculous new birth occurs within the believer by which one comes into possession of the very life of God.

The other is that the believer knows that he or she has this life.”

There is no mistaking that Hodges sees regeneration as a consequence or result of faith. **Regeneration occurs because of faith.** For Hodges **faith clearly precedes regeneration**, which not only distances him from the **I** of **TULIP** but also from the **T** which is **TOTAL DEPRAVITY**.

Since he has the unregenerate person responding in faith to the gospel, he cannot possibly affirm the **doctrine of moral inability** that is essential to the **Reformed view of radical corruption or total depravity**. For this reason Hodges and others who define themselves as Dispensationalists are said by Gerstner to embrace a “**spurious**” form of Calvinism.

When speaking of the **order of salvation (*ordo salutis*)**, **Reformed theology** always and everywhere insists that **regeneration precedes faith**. Regeneration precedes faith because **it is a necessary condition for faith**.

Indeed, it is the *sine qua non* [**an indispensable and essential action, condition, or ingredient**] of **faith**. It is important to understand, however, that the **order of salvation** refers to a **logical order**, not necessarily a **temporal order**.

For example, *when we say that justification is by*

faith, we do not mean that faith occurs first, and then we are justified at some later time. We believe that at the very moment faith is present, justification occurs. There is no time lapse between faith and justification. They occur simultaneously.

Why then do we say **that faith precedes justification?** **Faith precedes justification** in a logical sense, not a temporal sense. **Justification is logically dependent on faith, not faith on justification.** We do not have faith because we are justified; we are justified because we have faith.

Similarly when **Reformed theology** says **regeneration precedes faith**, it is speaking in terms of **logical priority**, not **temporal priority**. We cannot exercise saving faith until we have been regenerated, so we say **faith is dependent on regeneration, not regeneration on faith.** Hodges and all **semi-Pelagians** argue that **regeneration is a result of faith and dependent on it.**

This assumes that the not-yet-regenerate person can exercise saving faith.

Again we are forced back to the question of the extent of original sin. If original sin involves moral inability, as Augustine and the magisterial Reformers insisted, then faith can occur only as the result of regeneration, and regeneration can occur only as a result of effectual or irresistible grace.

To say that the grace of regeneration is irresistible is simply to say that this grace, which is so vital to our salvation, is sovereign. **This grace is dispensed sovereignly and freely by God.**

It is truly grace, with no mixture of human merit of any kind.

By this grace the captives are set free and the dead in sin are raised to a new life. This is the manifest work of the tender mercy of God, who stoops to rescue His children from sin and death and who, as He did in the initial work of creation, takes pieces of clay that are spiritually lifeless and breathes into them the breath that quickens them.

CORAM DEO (Before the face of God)

Integrity, *Coram Deo*

(Continuation from last edition)

The apostle Paul knew well that the heart of the Christian life is building an intimate knowledge of Christ. That's why he said, **"I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord" (Philippians 3:8).** That was both his passion and his **"goal" (v. 14).** **"I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."** (**Philippians 3:14 (NASB)**)

What were the **"all things"** he considered as loss? They were the ultimate credentials of the works-righteousness religion Paul served before coming to know Christ. He was **"circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless" (Philippians 3:5-6 (NASB)).** According to the conventional religious wisdom of his day, Paul followed the right rituals, was a member of the right race and tribe, adhered to the right traditions, served the right religion with just the right amount of intensity, and conformed to the right law with self-righteous zeal.

But one day when he was traveling to persecute more Christians, Paul met Jesus Christ (**Acts 9**). Paul saw Christ in all His glory and majesty, and he realized that all he thought was of value was worthless. So he says, **"Whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ ... and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ" (Philippians 3:7-8 (NASB)).** In Paul's mind, his assets had become liabilities—to such a degree that he considered them trash. Why? Because they couldn't produce what he thought they could—they couldn't produce righteousness, power, or endurance. And they couldn't lead him to eternal life and glory. So Paul gave up all His religious treasure for the treasure of knowing Christ deeply and intimately.

That is the essence of salvation—an exchange of something worthless for something valuable. Jesus illustrated the exchange in this way: **"The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a**

man found and hid; and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has, and buys that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls, and upon finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had, and bought it” (Matthew 13:44–46 (NASB)). Those two men found something of far greater value than anything they owned. For them the decision was easy: sell all they thought was valuable for what was truly valuable.

That’s what happens to those God chooses to bring into His kingdom. The person who comes to God is willing to pay whatever He requires, no matter how high the price. When confronted with his sin in the light of the glory of Christ—when God takes the blinders off his eyes—the repentant sinner suddenly realizes that nothing he held dear is worth keeping if it means losing Christ.

Pastoral in Nature

Why Some Preachers Get Better and Others Don’t

“I’ve seen guys whose initial sermon was depressingly awful turn it around so radically I almost couldn’t recognize them as the same preacher.”

I often have to answer the strangest question anyone could ask a preaching professor: “Do you think preaching can be taught?” I always want to respond, “No, I’m just going through the motions for the money.” Of course I never do, not only because it’s best not to say the smart aleck things I sometimes think, but because I know what they mean when they ask. It’s not really an unfair question.

No one denies that a preaching class and some coaching can help anyone become better. What we question is the possibility that someone with no natural giftedness and ability can be taught well enough that he can become really good.

For the last 16 years I’ve sat in a seminary classroom, listening to student sermons on a regular basis, and I’ve heard every kind of sermon and every level of preacher.

I’ve seen guys so nervous that they had to stop and vomit during the sermon, and I’ve been so moved by a student’s sermon that I felt I had been ushered into the presence of the risen Christ. I’ve seen guys who were no better the fifth time they preached for me than they were the first time, but I’ve seen guys whose initial sermon was depressingly awful turn it around so radically by the end of the semester that I almost couldn’t recognize them as the same preacher.

On the first day of the semester, or the first time I hear a student preach, I have no way of knowing if he has what it takes or is willing to do what he must to be the preacher he needs to be, but I can usually tell by the second sermon if he does, because that is when he has to act on what I told him after his first sermon.

What makes the difference?

1. Calling

The most frustrated preacher is the one who has a sense of duty, but not a burning calling.

Preaching is not just another helping profession, a Christian version of politics or the Peace Corps. The call to preach is a definite demand issued by the Holy Spirit that ignites a fire in one’s bones that cannot be extinguished by the hard-hearted, stiff-necked or dull of hearing.

A preacher who has been called must preach what God has spoken simply because God has spoken it. The success of one’s ministry will depend on the strength of his calling. His willingness to work at his preaching will be proportional to his conviction that God has called him to preach and to be as fit a vessel for God’s use as he can be.

The Holy Spirit must undergird everything else from preparation to delivery, and that will not happen apart from that calling.

2. Teachability

Being a preaching professor is like getting paid to tell a mother that her baby is ugly. It might be the truth, but it’s not a truth anyone wants to hear.

Most guys I have taught dread my comments and cringe when I tell them they missed the point of the text or seemed unprepared. They tire of hearing me tell them

they lacked energy or failed to establish a connection with the audience.

Every now and then, however, someone smiles gratefully as I offer corrections and suggestions.

Someone may even say, “I want you to be really tough on me. Tell me everything I’m doing wrong because I really want to do this well.” That guy is going to be fine because his spirit is teachable and he’s willing to pay the cost of personal discomfort in order to be effective. He understands that he is a vessel in service of the text, and his feelings are not the point.

3. Passion

Almost all my students are passionate about Christ, about reaching the lost and about the Word of God. The problem is not that they don’t feel passionate, but rather that they do not show passion. What I feel is never the point, whether good or bad, but rather how I act.

If my delivery of the Word does not convey that passion, then my audience will not be moved to be passionate about it either. The prophets were all passionate. The apostles were passionate. Jesus was passionate. Why else would farmers, fishermen and housewives come and stand in the Galilean sun for hours just to hear Him?

I once heard a missionary preach at the Pastors Conference. He was dynamite, preaching a great expository sermon with incredible energy and moving the entire audience by his treatment of the Word and his testimony of baptizing tens of thousands of Africans. Astonished by his great preaching, I approached him and held out my hand to introduce myself.

“Eddie,” he said, shocking me that he knew my name, “we went to seminary together.” Embarrassed, I admitted that I did not remember him. “You had no reason to,” he explained, “I was very quiet, never spoke in class and never went out of my way to meet anyone.” I asked him to explain what happened.

“When I got on the mission field, no one would

listen to my preaching of the gospel. I was putting them to sleep. When I came stateside and preached in churches, they were bored to tears. Finally, I realized that the only way to be effective was to preach the Word in the way it deserved to be preached, so I became willing to go beyond my natural personality and comfort zone and allow God to make me effective. I prayed for the Word to so grip me in the pulpit that I would never be boring again.”

His teachability led him to show a passion that was not natural to his introverted personality. It was supernatural.

4. Reckless Abandon

The generation of students I now teach have grown up with the written word — on screens, smart phones, blogs, Kindles and now iPads. Through video games they have raced cars, built civilizations, won wars, destroyed zombies and killed hundreds.

They communicate orally far less than any previous generation, and when they do so, they typically do it with less passion. Yet God still uses the preaching of His Word — an oral event — to edify the church, encourage the saints and engage the lost.

So to preach the Word, a young man has to be willing to get completely out of the comfortable cocoon he’s built in his personality and habits, and recklessly abandon himself to risk being a fool for Christ.

I tell my students, “That little voice inside your head saying ‘That’s just not who I am’ is not your friend. Sanctification is the process by which the Holy Spirit overcomes ‘who I am’ and shapes me into who He wants me to be. So if I need to preach with a reckless abandon that is foreign to my natural way, I will beg the Holy Spirit to help me do it for Christ.”

Pay the Price

Frankly, very few students I teach fail to get the meaning of the text. They often demonstrate an exegetical and hermeneutical sophistication that astounds me. They are serious about the Word.

But they make the mistake of thinking that if they just feel that way, and if they just say the words, the preaching will take care of itself. And if they keep thinking that, if they insist on “data dump” sermons that just concentrate on the content and not also on the delivery, there’s not much I can do for them. They will be the kind of preachers they want to be.

But if someone has a burning calling, a teachable spirit, a passionate heart and a reckless abandon to pay the price to preach well, then not even the limitation of their own background, personality or natural talents will keep them from preaching the Word of God with power.



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Hebrews 5 - Overview

Author’s Note: The overview study for each chapter of Hebrews is intended to simply provide a basic understanding of some of the various key elements of each chapter and is not written as an in-depth theological treatise.

This study is the overview of [Hebrews 5](#). This is a chapter without the word “**therefore**”, so in essence, the author is simply continuing what he had begun in [Hebrews 4:12](#) and will begin his ongoing discussion relative to Christ being our “**High Priest**”. This strong doctrinal discussion goes from [Hebrews 4:14](#) through [Hebrews 10:18](#) (six chapters). However, integral within that doctrinal section, the author continues to provide two strong warnings ([Hebrews 5:12-14](#) and [Hebrews 6:4-8](#)) to those who may not be taking their Christianity as seriously as they should. The warning in [Hebrews 6](#) is a very strong warning and the next warning given in [Hebrews 10:26-30](#) is just as strong, maybe even more so. So, the entire teaching on the High Priestly ministry of Christ is bookended with two of the strongest warnings in all of Scripture. Now, if someone is any kind of responsible and thoughtful student of Scripture, then what has just been said should get their attention. Here

is the way that it should affect every believer: If there is one thing that a Christian cannot take lightly, it is the person and work of Jesus Christ. It is a sacred area that God will not tolerate being treated lightly. Hebrews 10:29-31 expresses it this way,

²⁹Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? ³⁰For we know Him who said, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord. And again, “The Lord will judge His people.” ³¹It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

It appears that everything in [Hebrews 5](#) is building a foundation for what the author is about to say in [Hebrews 6](#) – which is considered by many as the most difficult passage in all of Scripture to interpret. The author wants the reader to know that they have a great High Priest, one who has experienced everything that they have experienced – and worse. [Hebrews 5:8](#) simply says that “**He learned obedience by the things which He suffered**”. However, the problem that the author is going to address is simply that many of these Hebrews “**have become dull of hearing**” and need “**milk and not solid food**”. Apparently they are not able to appreciate the greatness of who Christ is and when that happens, it simply means that the individual will have great difficulty entering into the spiritual rest that Christ has provided or gathering spiritual strength from His life. So, when the author arrives at [Hebrews 6:1](#) he begins to urge the readers to “**go on to perfection**” or “**maturity**”. He is urging them and exhorting them to maturity. No Christian can grow to maturity without effort, without spiritual concentration, or without discipline. And the more that they ignore the essential elements of the Christian life, the less they will understand the greatness of Christ. They will lack discernment (v14) and judgment. They will lack wisdom. They will lack spiritual perspec-

tive and conviction. And the result of that kind of spiritual negligence is the basis for the incredibly strong warning in [Hebrews 6:4-8](#).

Now, [Hebrews 5](#) is basically divided into three (3) distinct sections. The first section is v1-4 and it provides the qualifications for the earthly priests of the Old Testament who were a picture of the true High Priest who is Christ. The second section is from v5-11 and it is the primary introductory teaching relative to the high priestly ministry of Christ on the believer’s behalf. The third section is v12-14 and is an admonition and reproof for some of the readers directed at their lack of spiritual maturity. He has some very stern words for them in [Hebrews 6](#), but he fully understands that at the heart of their problems is a foundational lack of appreciation for Christ. They are still giving their attention to elementary things like “**baptisms**” and the “**laying on of hands**” ([Hebrews 6:2](#)), but not to Christ. They have simply lost an understanding of what their real spiritual focus should be, and the result is that they are deeply wavering in their Christian life. Unfortunately, that seems to have become the norm for many segments of Christianity - a loss of focus and priority concerning Christ.

Within [Hebrews 5](#) there are no verbs in the imperative mood, so there are no actual commands in the chapter. There are no actual promises, no major exhortations, and no major connecting words. There is not an abundance of repeated words or phrases. The repeated phrases would be the term “**High Priest**” used three (3) times (v1,5,10), the phrase “**according to the order of Melchizedek**” used twice (v6,10), and the words “**milk**” and “**solid food**” used twice each in v12-14. There is one major reproof that is given in v11 – “**you have become dull of hearing**”, and it is further explained in v12-14 and continues into [Hebrews 6](#). And lastly, there are three (3) Old Testament quotations, two of which are the same (v5,6,10). The one in v5 has been the source of great theological debate because of the word “**begotten**”. Most of the translations use the word “**begotten**”, but the NIV, for instance, translates it

as “**today I have become your Father**” – which is a very misleading translation. An observant reader can understand just by that reading what the controversy swirls around –whether Christ is eternal God, or was He “begotten” or “born” at some point in time. It is a very crucial element of doctrine to understand relative to the word “**begotten**” and exactly how it is used in Scripture. In this case, it is clearly referring to the simple fact that Jesus Christ completely fulfilled and willingly entered into His divinely appointed role as Savior. He could not fulfill that redemptive part of His Sonship until the Incarnation when God the Son became the God-Man forever. All of this is mentioned simply to bring attention to the fact that the word “**begotten**” has been a theological battlefield that people have used to deny the deity of Christ.

The heart of [Hebrews 5](#) is the exaltation of Christ, specifically from v5-10. There are seven (7) statements made about Christ in those six (6) verses.

V5 - Christ did not glorify Himself to become High Priest.

V6 – Christ was appointed to be a priest **forever**.

V7 – Christ prayed earnestly and passionately.

V7 – As the God-Man, Christ had “**godly fear**”, or reverence for the things of God.

V8 – Christ learned obedience through suffering.

V9 – Christ was perfected, or perfectly equipped, to be the author or source of eternal salvation.

V10 – Christ was called by God to be High Priest.

Now, just think through what has been stated in those several verses. Christ is the believer’s “**example**”, the One they are to follow. [1 Peter 2:21](#) speaking specifically of servants says this about Christ,

21For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps:

Whenever a believer comes to the exaltations of Christ, those exaltations become their example, their

pattern, and the model for their life. They are the very things that each believer is to emulate and follow in their life. Some of the characteristics given about Christ are purely doctrinal as they relate to His Person and His sacrificial work on our behalf. However, much of what is written is clearly provided as a model for each believer to follow, and those exhortative elements need to be recognized and embraced when the believer comes to them in the Scriptures. So, once again, think about how Christ is portrayed in these several verses. Christ did not seek glory, He prayed earnestly and passionately, He had a deep reverence for the things of God, He was both obedient and willing to suffer, and He was perfectly equipped by God for His divine mission. All of those are truths that each believer needs to embrace and emulate in their life. Recently I received a text from Dr. Eddie Ildefonso relative to violence directed at Christians in Pakistan. This is what it said,

“Pray for Pakistan. Over 100 houses of our church members have been burnt down and 82 members killed by the Muslims. They now have 165 orphans to take care of. Please have the church pray and prepare an offering to send to the pastors. My heart is broken. Among the dead are 17 pastors who held off the mob to give their people a chance to escape.”

These people are living out their Christianity, and for many it is costing them their lives. They are willing to suffer just as Christ was, but that is the example that Christ left. Too often nominal believers are much too casual and indifferent to the demands of Christ on their lives. America is one of the few remaining places in the world where you can have a Christianity that does not cost you anything. Many segments of the American church are much more desirous of comfort and convenience than they are of heart-felt commitment and sacrifice. And words such as “suffering” simply are not in their Christian vocabulary. The American Christian culture has developed a very comfortable and relaxed Christianity which in this author’s opinion is most likely not Christianity at all. I was

reading in a study on Revelation by John MacArthur and he related an incident that he had with a Russian pastor who had attended his church. This is what he said,

I will never forget standing down here in front of this row after a service and having a pastor come to me when the Soviet Union was still under communist rule and shaking my hand and saying, I have read your material in Russian and I come here and I have experienced your church today and I just want to tell you I don't know how you can possibly endure being a pastor in the United States." And I said, What do you mean?" He said, I could never be a pastor here. It's so much easier in the Soviet Union." I said, Why do you say that?" He said, Because your people are caught up in the world and material things and comfort and how can you find true commitment?" He said, I would far rather pastor in the Soviet Union."

Christ is every believer's example, and every believer is to follow His example. The first recorded words of Christ to individuals was to Peter and Andrew in [Matthew 4:19](#) where He said,

¹⁹....**Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.**

[Matthew 10:38](#) says,

³⁸**And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me.**

[Matthew 16:24](#), one of the most discomfiting passages in the New Testament, says,

²⁴**Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.**

[John 10:27](#) says,

²⁷**My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.**

This is the very heart and soul of the Christian life – following Christ, following His example, being obedient to His Word and His call on our life. However, it may very well be one of the most neglected

aspects of many segments of the Christian community – saying we are followers without actually following.

Christ is every believer's example, and **every passage about Christ** is filled with life-transforming truth that is to be incorporated into the believer's personal life. We cannot be considered followers of Christ without actually following Christ.

Several of the key phrases of [Hebrews 5](#) would be "**learned obedience**" (v8), "**to all who obey Him**" (v9), and "**have become dull of hearing**" (v11). The believer has to "**learn**" what it means to obey Christ, but that learning process can obviously be impeded by an unwillingness to really "**hear**" and listen to what God is saying. So the author addresses this "**hearing**" issue in a **reproof** that he gives in [Hebrews 5:11](#) when he says,

of whom we have much to say, and hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.

What does this mean? What is the author trying to communicate to his readers? Well, his use of the word "**become**" implies something that has not just happened, but rather something that has happened over an extended period of time. It is not a difficult thing for believers to lose focus, and especially to lose their spiritual focus. The phrase "**dull of hearing**" is related to being distracted, to not paying attention, to not listening, and to being overly preoccupied and sidetracked by less important things. Just life itself can be a distraction, a diversion, and an interference to someone's spiritual progress. And the sad part is that without an intentional spiritual focus, the believer can never make any kind of spiritual impact on other people whatsoever. It is the spiritual issue of the believer becoming "**dull of hearing**". It is the reader's dullness that makes the truths concerning Christ "**hard to explain**". Please appreciate that the truths concerning Christ are really very simple truths, not truths that are difficult to understand. However, when someone is "**dull of hearing**", it makes everything that is being said to them so much more difficult to communicate. Christians who have become "**dull of hearing**" seem much more difficult to reach than actual

lost people. As [Hebrews 6](#) will reiterate, this is a tremendously dangerous place for a Christian to be.

Now, what follows, both in [Hebrews 5](#) and [Hebrews 6](#), is an explanation of the initial reproof of [Hebrews 5:11](#). Notice what the author says about these Christians. First he says in v12 that they have been sufficiently taught, and the way that he does this is by telling them that “**by this time you ought to be teachers**”. Then to reinforce that statement he declares to them in v12 that they “**have come to need milk and not solid food**”. He reproves them that they are “**unskilled in the word of righteousness**” (v13), and that “**solid food belongs to those who are of full age**” (v14). I.e., these Christians cannot handle “**solid food**”, or what he calls the “**word of righteousness**” (v12), even though they have been sufficiently taught. The Amplified Bible brings out the value of the phrase “**word of righteousness**” when it says that it is what helps a believer to conform to the will of God in their “purpose, thought, and action”. Everyone can be fully assured that just being properly taught is no guarantee that a believer will incorporate what they learn into their life, and that is exactly why we have to “**learn**” obedience. Every parent has to teach their children to obey – every parent. Obedience is something that believers learn to do, something that requires constant instruction and deliberate coaching and tutoring.

So, the first thing to be gleaned from this initial reproof in v12-14 is that it is giving a clear description of the difference between someone who is spiritually mature and someone who is just a “**babe**” – and it all centers around the “**word of righteousness**”, or the “**solid food**” given in the Scriptures. If a Christian does not give adequate attention to the Word of God, then they cannot be considered a mature Christian. They may be a Christian, but they are not a mature Christian. And if for any reason that describes a believer’s life, then they need to make the necessary adjustments in their life that will help them to become a mature and discerning Christian. The spiritual differ-

ence between “**milk**” and “**solid food**” is simple - babies feed on “**milk**” and mature adults feed on “**solid food**”.

Now, it is important to ask a question that is very critical relative to understanding [Hebrews 6](#). The **context** of these verses must not be lost, as well as what the author is doing and to whom he is speaking. This cannot be missed, and if it is, then the very strong warning of [Hebrews 6](#) will be misinterpreted. Here is the question - in [Hebrews 5:12-14](#) to whom is the author speaking? Who is his audience, who is he writing to? Is he giving this reproof to Christians or non-Christians? He is speaking specifically and directly to **immature Christians**. That should be evident and clear. He is not addressing people who are lost.

Why is this so important and critical to understand? It is because of [Hebrews 6](#). Notice in [Hebrews 6:1](#) that the author uses the word “**therefore**” to begin his introduction into the warning.

Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God,

The word “**therefore**” always points the reader **back** to what the author was just talking about and who he was talking to – and he was talking to Christians who were failing to mature in their Christian walk. The word “**therefore**” is specific validation that the author is actually continuing the previous discussion of [Hebrews 5](#). So, [Hebrews 6](#) is simply a **continuation** of the discussion of maturity vs. immaturity and it will provide an incredibly strong warning to those Christians who have failed to go on to spiritual maturity. The word “**perfection**” is the Greek word “*teleiotes*” and means to be in a state of completeness, both mentally and morally. Many of the translations actually use the word “**maturity**” which is much more consistent with the intended meaning.

Many of the commentators have great difficulty with [Hebrews 6](#) and they conclude that it is talking about Hebrews who have come very close to salvation, but have never actually been saved. However, it is very

clear and obvious that the author does not go from talking about Christians to talking about non-Christians. There is nothing in the text that would even hint that the author is drastically changing his audience. To the contrary, everything points to the fact that he is NOT changing his audience, but maintaining a clear argument for their very benefit. **Hebrews 6** is simply a more detailed discussion regarding those who have “become dull of hearing” and need “milk” rather than “solid food”. That must be seen and appreciated. The author is not changing his audience in midstream, and the key element that helps us promote that conclusion is the simple word “therefore” in **Hebrews 6:1**.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ MacArthur, Smyrna.
- ² Strong's, 1409

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