

Before we get into tonight's passage, I want to review the journey as we must be careful not to forget the overall context of this letter. In each passage we must remember that the "who" and the "why" are critical to our understanding of what the Spirit purposed to communicate.

Remember, this letter is addressed to Jewish born-again believers who because of the intense and oppressive persecution they face are being tempted to go back into the wilderness of religion. These are Jewish brethren who are once again looking with fondness upon Judaism thinking that if they just conform to and embrace the old practices that they will be able to practically ease their suffering and not have to live under constant terror and duress.

Therefore the Spirit writes to convince them that going back to the wilderness of religion is the worst thing they can do. After all, how can they even think about valuing the comforts and protections available in this life when they consider Jesus, consider who they are to Jesus, and consider the promise of **rest** that He has made to all believers—a promise that is to be experienced in our here and now notwithstanding our circumstances?

Accordingly, the Spirit opened up this letter by asking them to **consider** Jesus. The Spirit explained that Jesus is the heir of all things, created everything, is the radiance of the glory of God, is the exact imprint of the Father's nature, upholds the universe by the Word of His power, and even though He humbled Himself and took on the form of man, He now sits down at the right hand of the Father being so much more superior to anything that has been created whether seen or unseen. In addition, He said that Jesus is always the same and never changing.

As such, these believers need to fully **consider** Jesus and pay more attention to the message they have heard or else they will, by default, drift away from it. And if they neglect so great a salvation they will receive a just retribution as they will not be able to experience the **peace** and **rest** that God spoke about.

The Spirit then showed them how important they were to Jesus and explained that the creator of all that is seen and unseen has actually considered them, mere men, to be His brethren. After all, He was willing to become like them in every respect so He could break the power of death which Satan held over all humanity. He is even willing to speak to His brethren about the “**Name**” of the Father—the “**Name**” which the Jews, out of respect, would not even utter. Jesus even said that He is proud to praise His Father in the midst of all His brethren.

Next, the Spirit explained that even though under Joshua’s leadership the Promised Land was conquered and the people experienced rest from their enemies, it was not the true **rest** that God had promised His brethren. It was just a symbol of the rest that He would provide to those who would live by faith—those who would bet their lives on who Jesus is and who they are to Jesus. At the same time, those who do not want to live in this way will be relegated to live their lives in the wilderness of religion never experiencing the Lord’s peace and rest. Thus, the Spirit communicated that it is not enough to just become a Christian; but, the Spirit wants all of Jesus’ brethren to daily, actively, live by faith.

***Hebrews 4:14-16***

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. 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. 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.

In this passage, the Spirit continues with His apologetic or His argument as to why these believers must not go back to Judaism (and why we must never return to religion). As we just reviewed, in Chapter **1** and **2** the Spirit played the Jesus trump card. Jesus trumps their forefathers, the prophets, the angels, Moses, and, let's just say, everything and everyone. The very best that any religion has to offer is surpassed by the magnificence of Jesus Christ.

It's as if the Spirit included this passage in order to argue against the false ideas that were being propagated by the non-believing Jews. They were pressing on the Christians saying that since they had no tabernacle, no temple, no high priest, and no animals to sacrifice for sin, they should stop all this silliness about Jesus and return to the Jewish system that has the perfect temple service which, by the way, had been appointed by God. In fact, from **4:14** through the end of Chapter **10**, the Spirit addresses this argument and says that Jesus is far greater and grander than anything that Judaism has to offer. Because Jesus was both our High Priest and the sacrifice for sin, and His offering was perfect, none of those things required by Judaism are any longer needed or are even valid.

To start with, our great High Priest has passed through the heavens. The idea is that since Jesus now sits at the right hand of the Father, He has passed through every impassable barrier, including death, to be in the very presence of God the

Father. This stands in contrast to Judaism where the high priest was not allowed to pass through the Holy Place into the Holy of Holies except for once a year.

For those of you who are not familiar with the Jewish Temple or the Tabernacle from which the Temple was modeled, here is a diagram to familiarize you with the layout. This inner part of the Temple is where the priests did their work and no one else was allowed into this area except for the priests. Up these stairs is what is called the Holy Place which is where we find the entrance to the Holy of Holies. In the Holy of Holies is where the Ark of the Covenant (which held the mercy seat) was found and it was in here that God would make His presence visible to the High Priest.

However, there was a huge thick veil that separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies. This veil represented the separation between man and God; between man's failings and the holiness and perfection of God. Into the Holy Place only the High Priest was allowed to enter and then only one time per year on the Day of Atonement. On this one day he would enter and sprinkle the blood of the sacrifice on the mercy seat and in front of the mercy seat and offer up prayers on behalf of the nation for the forgiveness of sins.

As we discussed in the book of John, during Jesus' day the priesthood had become corrupt and was more of a political appointment than it was the God ordained position set aside for the descendants of Moses' brother Aaron, who was the first High Priest. As such, they would have to tie a rope on the ankle of the High Priest when he entered the Holy Place because if he was corrupt and had not done all that was necessary to atone for his own sins, he would drop dead in the presence of a Holy God. And since no one else was allowed in the room or

else they would likewise die, the other priests would have to drag him out by the rope. So this was serious stuff; God was in the midst of His Temple and His holiness was powerful and intense and not to be messed with.

But we also know from **Acts 7:44** and Hebrews **8:5** that the Tabernacle was merely a copy designed from a pattern of what actually exists in heaven. And despite the physical and spiritual separation that exists between man and God Jesus was able to cross over every barrier and enter into the presence of the holiness of the Father. Therefore, our High Priest is far grander than anything that the Jewish religious system, or any religious system for that matter, has to offer.

As a result, we are told to presently and actively hold fast to our confession—literally in the Greek, our common Word. By the way, this verse is one of the reasons that I believe this letter is addressed to Jewish **born-again believers** and not just the Jewish religious population in general. So far, this letter has been an apologetic or an argument for believers to learn why they can trust Jesus with every aspect of their lives; it has not been an evangelistic letter intended to convert Jews. I say this because we do not have a common Word, or confession with the Jewish population at large; but our common Word is that Jesus is God, that Jesus is our I Am, our Messiah, our Savior, the only begotten son of the Father, the one who has forgiven our sins.

This is the common Word that binds all believers together and it is this truth that we are to **hold on** to in our now. It is the truth to which we are to cling. The message to these believers is that even though they are suffering great persecution at the hands of religious men, they can hold on because of who Jesus is and because of who they are to Jesus. And, since the word “confession” is in the

present active tense, this confession is to be a pillar of strength for us in our everyday experience of life. It is this confession of Christ that will enable us to withstand in the face of temptation and live in the truth that we are accepted to God as brethren of Jesus Christ. There is unbelievable power in this common Word or confession.

The next line of thinking in this passage is that although Jesus trumps the high priest of Judaism—and is the Holiness of God—still, He is not untouchable. He is not someone who is too high and lofty to be able to relate to our experiences and weaknesses as humans who are simply trying to figure out how to be in a relationship with the living God in a world that seems to hate Him as well as us.

You see, our High Priest was human. As we studied in Chapter **2**, Jesus humbled Himself and came to us cloaked in humanity so that He would experience every possible human situation and drama imaginable. He took our flesh and blood, a human body and a human soul, and lived a human life. And by assuming human nature, He was completely qualified to make atonement for the sins of the world.

After all, He knows the hurts and pains of humanity. He knows the loneliness and rejection. He knows hatred and oppression. He knows ridicule like no other. He knows mocking and disappointment. He knows betrayal, denial, and abandonment. He knows the isolation and the brokenness that is experienced in relationships. He also knows the temptation that is caused by the flesh of humanity. In fact, as we studied in **2:18** it was through His temptation that He suffered and learned how to be obedient to the Father. While on earth Jesus daily made the choice to reject the demands of His flesh and instead trust Himself to

the will of the Father, regardless of what He felt. Like us, His emotions were screaming at Him to take control, to take charge, to do it His own way. But Jesus refused.

So He understands our weaknesses as He was tempted in every way that we are tempted. Everything possible was thrown at Him; yet, ***He did not sin***. He constantly trusted Himself in every situation to the Father. He was in constant communication with His Father and He decided to let the Word of God be the ultimate authority over His life. Thus, despite the strength of the temptation, He found solace in yielding His will to the will of His Father.

Thus, on the one hand He is able to know how it feels to walk the path of humanity: He knows the struggle, He knows every ache and pain we endure, and He knows the fear that is in our hearts. But on the other hand, because He did not sin, He is the only one who is perfectly able to help us when we sin.

Do you understand? Jesus is not up there shaking His angry finger of disappointment at you when you blow it; rather, He sympathizes. He knows the reasons why you have chosen, in your moments of weakness, to not trust yourself to the Father; and He has compassion toward you and He extends His mercy.

It is so sad that so many of us have been raised thinking that God was this mean God that is nothing but angry and disappointed in us all the time. But that is just not the case; He understands what we have to go through because Jesus experienced the full strength of the temptation to not trust His Father. Jesus even knows what it is like to have the devil himself come full-on against Him and tempt Him to take matters into His own hands. And because He is so connected to our

experience and sympathizes, He allows us through Him—through His holiness—to draw near to His Father’s throne of grace that we may find both mercy and help.

In **4:16**, the Spirit sticks with the metaphor of the Holy of Holies and says that because of who we are to Jesus, because we hold to the common Word or confession, we can come into the **true** Holy of Holies (not the copy) anytime we want. Our access is not limited. We can come boldly, freely, confidently into His presence assured of His mercy and grace.

Therefore, unlike the high priest of Judaism, we do not have to be afraid of not “doing it right.” We don’t have to be so pedantic to follow some meticulous set of procedures. We don’t have to wear any religious garb or hold some religious office. We don’t need the blood of animals and we don’t even need a rope to be tied around our ankle “just in case.” ***We have been accepted in Christ.***

And because in His humanity Jesus suffered along with us, He is able to feel mercy for us—pity even. He knows the weakness of our flesh and from that platform of mercy and common experience He extends to us His grace. Grace is another way of saying favor or acceptance. Therefore, because of Christ we can approach the throne of the Father without fear knowing that He has given us the right and the privilege to be there.

The imagery here is powerful. In ancient times not just anyone could approach the king when he was sitting on his throne. For example, in the book of Esther we learn that even the Queen was not permitted to approach the throne of the Persian Monarch uninvited. She could try but unless she was extended the scepter of grace by the king she would be immediately executed. But you and I (all who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ) been permanently extended the



scepter of grace by the King of Kings and we can come into the Holy of Holies, the throne room of God the Father, any time we desire. Our High Priest, Jesus, has made us acceptable.

And the good news is that Jesus will extend this privilege to anyone who wants to be identified with Him—to anyone who wants Him to be their High Priest. You see the role of the priest was to intercede both between God and man and between man and God and Jesus perfectly fulfilled that role and made it possible for you and me to be in perfect fellowship with the Father all the time (not just once a year).

Being a good student of the Bible, you may be wondering how this passage connects to the epic verses in **4:12-13** about the power and the purpose of the Word of God in our lives as well as the whole metaphor in chapters **3** and **4** about those who wander the wilderness of religion and those who by faith enter the Promised Land. It is all part of the same line of thought.

You see, conquering our Promised Land is a difficult and timely task and it is inevitably fraught with many ups and downs and many, many failures (as we all know). But the Spirit is communicating that we can be at peace for we have been accepted in Christ. Jesus has done it all perfectly on our behalf so we don't have to fear when we fail. Instead, we can rejoice that we have such a merciful, compassionate, and faithful High Priest that regardless of our failures, we can come to our Father any time we want and simply enjoy His presence.

***Hebrews 5:1-4***

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. He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness. Because of this he is obligated to offer sacrifice for his own sins just as he does for those of the people. And no one takes this honor for himself, but only when called by God, just as Aaron was.

From the book of Leviticus, we find that Aaron was the first high priest. He was appointed by Moses after having been called by God. The title sounds pretty impressive but practically the role was that of a servant. The high priest knew that despite the garments he wore, he was just as sinful as the rest of the community. So if he had any integrity at all, he would serve from a place of humility, mercy, and compassion knowing that he was beset with the same weaknesses as those he served. He knew that he did not deserve his position based on anything he did; he was well aware that it was given to him by God. In addition, because he was a sinner, he had to continually offer up gifts and sacrifices for his own sins as well as the sins of the people.

But consider Jesus who never sinned but still freely offered up gifts and sacrifices as our High Priest. However, unlike the priests of Judaism He did not need to continue to make these offerings year after year for the offering of His perfect life provided the perfect sacrifice (***Romans 6:10: Hebrews 7:27***).

***Hebrews 5:5-6***

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"; as he says also in another place, "You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek."

The Spirit pulls from two passages in the Old Testament to ensure that these brethren understood that Jesus' position as High Priest was not only appointed by the Father it was also prophesied close to a thousand years in advance. "You are my son, today I have begotten you" is a quote from ***Psalm 2:7*** and ***Psalm 110:4*** says Jesus would come in the order of Melchizedek (not in the order of Aaron.)

So what does it mean to be in the order of Melchizedek? We will get into this in detail in Chapter 7, but for now, I want you to understand that this statement deals with authority and supremacy. The Spirit is communicating that Jesus' position of High Priest is vastly superior to the "Aaronic" priesthood of Judaism. It not only trumps it but truth be told, there is really no comparison.

The story of Melchizedek goes back to the days of Abraham who was the father of the Jews. In ***Genesis 14***, we find that Abraham submitted himself to this Melchizedek; which in the mind of a Jew would mean that the entire Jewish nation, along with all of its practices and privileges as a nation who was chosen by God, was submitted to Melchizedek.

Therefore, since the Father said that Jesus was a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek, it means that everything that is peculiarly Jewish is by definition submitted to the priesthood of Jesus Christ. Yes, Israel was a nation of

great privilege and through Abraham was handpicked by God amongst all the people of the earth to be set apart for His purposes; yet, even then their privilege was subordinated to a higher authority and that was the priesthood of Melchizedek—the priesthood of Jesus Christ.

Besides, Jesus' rule is forever whereas the rule of the high priest of Judaism lasts only as long as he lives. This means that there never will be a successor to Jesus; His reign is sustained in perpetuity. Besides, since the role of the High Priest is filled by the "Son of God," who in heaven or earth could ever qualify to fill His shoes and be His successor? Again, in reality, there is no comparison between the priesthood of Judaism and the priesthood of Jesus Christ. In fact, there is nothing or no one in the domain of humanity that can compare to Christ.

***Hebrews 5:7***

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 Spirit gives us insight into how Jesus lived out the role of our High Priest during His time on the earth. As I said before the role of the priest is that of an intermediary between man and God and God and man. In this instance we are dealing with both. 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.

This passage takes us back to the time period of Jesus' death and the anguish that He felt from the Garden of Gethsemane to His final breath on the cross. The implication is that Jesus, as our High Priest, was offering up prayers and supplications (which are actually two different things) on our behalf. He was praying for us and in effect begging (supplicating) that God would have mercy and fully accomplish His purposes on our behalf but through some other means.

Jesus knew that He would die and that His sacrifice would break the power of death which the devil held over man, but He wanted to know if there was another way other than the cross. Now, I do not believe that this was a selfish prayer—this was not about His suffering; it was about our suffering. Jesus knew that His children would have to walk down the same path that He walked and suffer in the same way He suffered. He knew that in order for us to experience new life (in the same way that He experienced new life when He was raised from the dead) we would have to also go by the way of the cross. As our High Priest, His soul was grieved to the point of death (**Matthew 26:38**) not wanting us to have to suffer in this manner.

I have always thought that Jesus' time in the garden was about His not wanting to suffer the cross because of His own considerations. But since the Spirit ties this passage to the garden suffering, that cannot be right. In the Garden Jesus was acting as our High Priest which means He was acting on our behalf. His prayers, His supplications, His loud screams and the tears were all for us. He asked His Dad, the one who could save Him from death, if there could be any other way; but as we know, there was no other pathway; which is why today we have to be likened to His crucifixion.

The Bible tells us that when we place our faith in Jesus Christ that He gives us a new nature—His nature. Because this ***new nature*** comes from God (and by definition is holy and pure); it stands in total opposition to our human nature which is corrupted and self seeking through and through. These two natures are always at war and our choices are never free from this conflict (***Galatians 5:17***).

Therefore, for us to be able to live from this ***new nature*** we have to learn how not to trust our *old sinful nature*, whom we know so well, and instead trust ourselves to God. This means that to experience this new life we have to deny ourselves, deny our wisdom, deny our ways, deny our rights and all that we claim to be our own, and instead choose to trust ourselves to God's wisdom for our life.

In ***Romans 6:6-7*** we are told that when a person accepts Christ that their *old sinful nature* is crucified with Christ so they would no longer be slaves to sin. In other words, sin's power to automatically control them was broken on the cross. Now, they have to learn how let it be dead and choose to no longer listen to the groaning of their dead man. And as many of you know, this process of learning to trust God in our ***new nature*** can be brutal, painful, full of suffering, and is usually quite an ugly process until His "death" is fully accomplished in us—which is just a metaphor for the complete rejection of all that does not come from God (which, by the way, is how we live in reverence of our Father; it's how we "*fear the Lord*").

But because Jesus has mercy and compassion for us, He wanted to save us from the pain that is involved in this process. He did not want us to have to endure the same kind of pain and suffering that He did; so with loud cries and tears He asked His dad if there was another way.

Now we are told that Jesus was heard because of His reverence. The word translated “reverence” occurs only one other time in the New Testament in **Hebrews 12:28** where it says: “let us serve him with reverence and godly fear.”

In other words, although Jesus desperately desired for there to be another way, He was willing to trust Himself (and us) to His Father and relent of His own desires. Hence, in the garden He concluded His time of prayer and supplication with: “yet not my will but your will be done” (**Luke 22:42**). This statement epitomizes what it means to “*fear the Lord*” and have reverence for God.

Like Jesus we are totally free to take all our cries and supplications to the Father, but in order to “*fear the Lord*” we must ultimately desire His will. And this is not because God is on some sort of a twisted power trip to which we have to submit. But when we **consider** Jesus and all that we have learned about Him, how much He loves us, and the fact that He sees from the beginning to the end, we can be confident that His will is always the best choice for our lives. The reason saying “your will and not my will” is reverence for the Lord is because we are declaring that despite what we want in our limited frame of reference, He is God and we are not.

As we know, even though Jesus’ prayer was heard it was **not** answered. Even though Jesus offered up prayers in faith, and His prayers were fully compatible with His role as our High Priest, the Father had something else in mind. The Father’s plan was that Jesus be not only our High Priest but also that He become the very sacrifice for sin. The Father needed Jesus to be placed on the altar in order that **in His physical body** He might take on the full judgment of the wrath of God for the sin of all mankind. The cross was simply necessary.

Likewise, many of our prayers are offered up with sincere desires, but often the Father has other plans in mind and so these prayers go unfulfilled. I know that this has confused many who, because of the intensity of their desire, assumed that their prayers were according to the will of God. But Jesus' example shows us that our intense desires do not automatically translate into God's will.

***Hebrews 5:8-10***

Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. 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.

This passage has always fascinated me. Jesus, the Son of God, learned obedience. I know that in His final passion He displayed His obedience, but that was not where He learned it. I believe that He learned obedience during the first 30-years of His life. Imagine, Jesus left heaven and came down in the form of man to be not just our High Priest but our entire provision for everything. Yet, the Father required Him to sit on the sidelines for 30 of His 33 years on the earth.

For 30 years the Father did not allow Him to tell anyone about who He was, why He had come to earth, or who His Father was. He was not allowed to heal a single person and probably had to watch His own earthly father die without being able to do a thing. He walked the streets of His community for all those years and saw such intense suffering; yet, He was not allowed to alleviate their pain. He even had to listen to the teachers of the law pervert God's Word and trap those



He loved in wrong belief. He was not even allowed to clarify what His Dad really was saying; He just had to watch it all happen in front of His face.

Have you ever stopped to think about how much intense suffering this caused Jesus? He loved us so much that He left heaven to become one of us and yet for so many years He just had to watch all the pain, all the suffering, and all the damage. You have to know He was tempted to take matters into His own hands and do something “good for God;” but despite what He felt, despite what the enemy told Him, He chose to only do what His Father told Him to do, only say what His Father told Him to say, and only go where His Father told Him to go. I believe that it was this obedience that prepared Him for the ultimate act of obedience on the cross.

Therefore, having perfected His obedience and fully completing all that the Father desired of Him (**John 17:4**), He became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey Him—to all who are willing to believe in Him—being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek. He is “**the**” source; as such, there is no other way to experience salvation except through Jesus.

What is most fascinating is that His obedience can become your obedience. All Jesus asks of you is to believe that He is God and to be fully convinced that you are not. In so doing, you must be willing to let your old sinful nature be crucified on the cross and remain crucified on the cross; for all Jesus asks is that you let His life, through the **new nature** that He offers to anyone who believes, become your life. That is what it means to “obey Him”—to obey our High Priest and be a recipient of this great salvation.

And since He is “the” source, our source, we must refuse to go back to religion. We must refuse to follow anyone or anything else for there is only one source of eternal salvation and that is the person of Jesus Christ. Let’s stop here and we will pick up in **5:11** next week.

Let’s Pray