

# Hebrews

## Hebrews 5:11 to 6:12 - Through faith and patience

Part 1 of Hebrews 4 defines the gospel as entering God's rest, which the Israelites could have done, but faced with testing they lost their confidence in God, hardened their hearts against him, and rebelled against anything and everything that came from him (Hebrews 3:7-19). Their relationship with God disintegrated, which was such a pity because entering God's rest is so much about entering into the same loving, trusting relationship with God that Jesus has. Which explains why Hebrews was written, because the Jewish Christians it was written to, and for, were in danger of following in Israel's footsteps.

Part 2 of Hebrews 4, continuing through to chapter 5:10, therefore, is about the help God has provided in Jesus as our high priest to enable us NOT to do what Israel did, but to keep on trusting and seeking help whenever we need it if life gets tough and we're tempted to throw in the towel too. And to help that along we're given a picture of the kind of high priest Jesus is (4:14 to 5:3), which the Jewish Christians in Hebrews would have known about, having come from a background of high priests stretching all the way back to Aaron. They also knew the story of Melchizedek, God's high priest in the time of Abram, who cared for Abram in his time of need too (Genesis 14:17-20).

There was really no excuse, therefore, for the Jewish Christians in Hebrews to be drifting away (Hebrews 2:1) or allowing **their** hearts to be hardened by sin's deceitfulness (the "poor old me" attitude when testing our faith gets tough) in Hebrews 3:13. They knew what God's goal for them was, they knew it involved testing, and they knew if they wavered or needed help they had a high priest in the heavenly realm full of mercy and grace they could call on at any time and receive an answer (4:14-16).

The author of Hebrews, therefore, wanted to get into a meaty discussion on all the ramifications and extraordinary opportunities opened up to them by the Melchizedek priesthood of old being revived in their day in Jesus. It would create a huge advance in their understanding of Jesus, and not only would it prepare them beautifully for experiencing Jesus' priesthood personally, it would also equip them to explain it to others for their benefit too.

But instead, unfortunately, **Hebrews 5:11**, the author had to say, "it's not easy digging into these things with you, because you are slow to learn."

The Greek word for “slow” in that verse meant sluggish, listless, or in our terms today, “out of shape.” So it’s not surprising their out of shape brains weren’t that interested in a deeper study or discussion. But how did they get into this sluggish state in the first place?

Does it go back to the question in **Hebrews 2:3** - “how shall we escape if we **ignore such great salvation?**” Did they, for instance, really grasp what their own Scriptures had said about the salvation that would be coming through the Messiah? It seems not, because “by this time” in their Christian lives, **Hebrews 5:12**, they “ought to be teachers” of that salvation, but instead they needed people to teach them. And not just about Jesus being “designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek” (5:10) as the key to their salvation, but right back to “the elementary truths of God’s word” too, **verse 12**.

So where had their brains been instead? There’s a clue in **verse 13**, that they weren’t “**acquainted with the teaching about righteousness.**” Somehow they’d lost sight of the basics, that in God “bringing many sons to glory,” righteousness - or “being made holy” (2:11) - plays a key role.

And not only does it play a key role in our lives, it played a key role in Jesus’ life too. He was **well acquainted** with the teaching about righteousness, having lived a perfectly righteous life. But it was something he had to learn too. He wasn’t automatically righteous, because “Although he was a Son, he **learned obedience** from what he suffered” (5:8). And since he suffered a lot during his lifetime, then learning about righteousness was a **lifetime process** for him - and especially since he was “tempted in every way” to **not** be righteous or obedient to his Father too. But “never did he sin” (4:15).

To never sin meant, of course, that he had to know what a perfectly sinless, righteous life was (and wasn’t), and we know **where he got that knowledge from** in his answer to the devil’s temptations in **Matthew 4**. To each temptation he replied, “**It is written,**” **verses 4, 7, 10**. He knew his Bible, and that it was “living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword” that “judged the very thoughts and attitudes of **HIS** heart” too, **Hebrews 4:12**.

Scripture, therefore, was his guide and standard, and he had to know it well, because it didn’t miss a beat when it came to human thoughts and attitudes. Every bit of it in some way or other “uncover and lays bare everything about us before the eyes of him to whom we must give account” (4:13). And Jesus had to run that gauntlet too, and especially since he himself was called “The Word,” so as a human being he had to be the **perfect reflection** of the Scriptural “word” too.

But, having done that as a human being he became “the author of our salvation” (2:10 and 5:9), **to enable us now to do as he did**. So just as he was made perfect in his holiness, obedience and righteousness, by enduring every temptation, test and suffering without ever sinning once, that is “the great salvation” he is now our high priest to open up to us too.

And a major part of that great salvation he’s now authoring in us as our high priest is what **Hebrews 5:14** describes as being able to “distinguish good from evil.” And that’s good to know because **sin is deceitful**. It got the Israelites thinking God was evil for putting them through all those painful tests (3:8-10). So they never cottoned on to **why** God was testing them. They couldn’t distinguish the “good” he had in mind, that each time he got them through a test it was more proof he was a living God they could trust their lives with, so when they faced more tests in future they’d trust him then too.

Was it the endless testing that got to them, therefore? Or was it that they expected God to “do it all” for them, so they could breeze through life without needing any testing of their faith? Or was it simply never coming to terms with the process God set up to **grow them up** from being cry babies every time something didn’t add up, into becoming strong, unshakeable, powerful, bulletproof humans properly reflecting what the Father created his children to be?

Well, whatever their problem was that was knocking the stuffing out of them and making them sluggish, the solution was simple. It was back in **Hebrews 4:11**, “Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter God’s rest.” So when another test, trial, frustration or temptation struck a discouraging and disheartening blow, it was up to them **to steel their minds against anything else but trust in God**. That was the purpose of all that testing God did with the Israelites, that eventually they’d get the point that God could be trusted, so they wouldn’t let their minds think otherwise.

And by constantly doing that they were training their minds, as **Hebrews 5:14** says, to “distinguish good from evil.” They’d get really good at sensing what the test **could** do to them: they could either go with sin’s deceitfulness and blame God for treating them so shabbily, or stay calm and let God work it out his way. That was their choice, but surely as mature Christians - and not cry babies anymore - they knew God’s ways. They knew how God operates to grow us up into bulletproof children who love and trust him. And how well they should’ve known how sin’s deceitfulness works too, that its one never ending goal was to harden their hearts against God and justify them saying nasty things about him.

So the author of Hebrews is asking these Christians in **Hebrews 6:1-2**, “Can you see where God’s taking us? He’s leaving behind all those elementary teachings that got our minds focused on Christ in the first place, to trusting in him as our living high priest to get us through every trial and frustration we face with flying colours. Because that’s what he’s there for. So get your minds trained to doing that as a habit by making every effort each time a test comes up to trust him, and **not allow your minds to think otherwise.**”

Because that’s what the gospel teaches us, it’s about a living high priest who knows exactly what we’re going through, because he went through it himself, so he also knows what all this testing of our faith is for, to mature us just as it matured him, to a level of such trust we are unshakeable. What a great shame, then, that halfway through that process AFTER “having been enlightened and tasted the heavenly gift, and we’ve shared in the Holy Spirit and tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age,” **verses 4-5**, we get shaky and wondering if all this stuff we’re going through really has any purpose to it after all. Well, of course it has purpose, it’s what Christ died for (verse 6), to open up the doors to a relationship with his Father and himself that makes us into powerfully confident Christians that no evil or mental torture caused by this world can crack.

That’s what it means by “salvation.” It’s a salvation we can experience right now, every day. It’s worth the effort, therefore, to train our minds by the constant exercise of trusting our high priest any time we’re floundering or needing help, because we also have to accept from the Israelites’ experience that there is both blessing and cursing. They were blessed when they trusted God, just as “Land that drinks in the rain produces a good crop,” **verse 7**. In other words, keep on drinking in God’s word and tap into what he set up for us in Jesus being our high priest, and our confidence and trust in him will grow. What a curse (verse 8) by comparison, ending up like these Christians in Hebrews, who’d started off well but like the Israelites couldn’t see how testing their faith was designed to make their experience of salvation real.

But, **verse 10**, “God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them.” You were doing great, the author of Hebrews tells them, so “show this same diligence to the very end,” **verse 11**. Hang in there, don’t get “lazy,” **verse 12**, because it’s “**through faith and patience** that we inherit what’s been promised.” That’s the set up God put in place, and it works. What’s been promised in salvation is a relationship with God that can survive anything this world throws at us, and each time we trust him that relationship becomes more real. Which is hugely important because we’re also up against the deceitfulness of sin, which wants to make US think God’s evil and wrong in testing us too.