

Hebrews 5:1-4

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The Pauline Author lists the qualifications for a priest: appointed by God, offers gifts and sacrifices, human with human weaknesses, and can deal with sinners with understanding.

The Pauline Author lays out the qualifications for being a priest and in the next verses will show how Christ meets these qualifications. Since the audience of Hebrews was a group of Jewish believers, they would be very familiar with the role and qualifications of priests. *Every high priest taken from among men is appointed on behalf of men in things pertaining to God* (v 1), to mediate between men and God. They *offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins* (v 1) on behalf of the people to God. Since priests themselves are human, they are able to *deal gently* and empathize with those who are *ignorant and misguided* (v 2).

The phrase *deal gently* implies compassion; all men are weak, so we ought to be able to empathize or have compassion on one another in our *weaknesses*. A priest *himself also is beset with weakness* (v 2) in the face of sin. *Because of the weaknesses that come with being human, a priest is obligated to offer sacrifices for sins, as for the people, so also for himself* (v 3). He offers sacrifices on his own behalf, as well as for the people he represents (Leviticus 16:6). Jesus meets this qualification as well, since He is human and was tempted in every way any human is tempted (Hebrews 2:18, 4:18), yet He never sinned.

Lastly, priests do not appoint themselves nor are they appointed by the people. Rather, they are appointed by God: *And no one takes the honor to himself, but receives it when he is called by God, even as Aaron was* (v 4). The Pauline Author uses *Aaron* as an example of a priest being *called by God* (Exodus 28:1). *Aaron* was the first high priest over Israel. Jesus is the last. In many cases, Jesus is the second and better version of men in the Old Testament called by God for specific purposes: Jesus is the second and better Joshua, just as He is the second and better Adam (Romans 5:14) and the second and better Moses (Deuteronomy 18:15).

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Biblical Text

¹ For every high priest taken from among men is appointed on behalf of men in things pertaining to God, in order to offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins; ² he can deal gently with the ignorant and misguided, since he himself also is beset with weakness; ³ and because of it he is obligated to offer sacrifices for sins, as for the people, so also for himself.

⁴ And no one takes the honor to himself, but receives it when he is called by God, even as Aaron was.