

True Christian Priesthood

No discussion of priesthood would be complete without a discussion of the truest sense in which God views each Christian as a priest. The book of Revelation, for example, makes it clear that Christians will indeed be considered priests in the age to come. “To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen” (Rev. 1:5b–6).¹ “Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years” (Rev. 20:6; compare with 3:21; 5:10). This may seem a bit confusing, since in chapter 14 we saw that the Aaronic, or Levitical priesthood of Israel was actually done away with. How then can Christians be considered priests?

The Foundation of Christian Priesthood

Just as Jesus was about to die He said “It is finished,” and crying out said “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” With that He expired. At that very moment the veil in the temple which separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place was torn in two from the top to the bottom (Matt. 27:51; Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45). The fact that it was torn top down signifies that it was done at the initiative of God, and by Him alone. It would have been incredibly sinful for any mere human to have done this. And with the curtain no longer an obstacle, the way directly into the Most Holy Place, the abode of the Father Himself, was opened up. Our way into the Most Holy Place was made possible by this broken veil, representing the broken body of Christ. Therefore, through the broken body and spilt blood of Jesus’ perfect sacrifice, believers now have direct and confident access to God Himself. Hallelujah! Praise God! The author of Hebrews puts it this way: “Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith” (Heb. 10:19–22a).

Direct access to the Father was now granted to all believers; previously, this access had only been possible for Israel’s priesthood. This explains why “every Christian was held to be a priest unto God”² in the primitive Christian church of the first century, before undue separation of ministry and laity crept into the church in later centuries. The concept that Christians were now

1. Please note the similarity of this passage with Ex. 19:6, where God was giving Israel their national identity as His “treasured possession,” to be for Him “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” It is significant to note that this same wording is also applied to the Christian church by the apostle Peter in 1 Peter 2:9.

2. Latourette, p.133.

equally alike in approaching the Father for themselves is called the “Priesthood of all Believers,” and was one of the major tenets argued and fought for by the great reformer Martin Luther.

Christian Sacrifices

And this Christian priesthood is not without its own set of sacrifices. The apostle Peter says that we are to be “a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 2:5). The Christian’s sacrifices then are not the blood sacrifices which the Levitical priesthood was obliged to offer as an atonement for sin; Jesus’ blood took care of our entire sin problem “once for all” (Heb. 7:27). The Christian is to offer *spiritual* sacrifices. So what constitutes an appropriate spiritual sacrifice for a Christian? Probably the best example is that given by the apostle Paul in Romans 12:1. “Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship.” He continues by explaining the way in which we do this, “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will” (v. 2).

The way our sacrifice begins is by acknowledging that our fallen, corrupt and fleshly bodies and minds are part of the old order of things and have been crucified along with Christ.³ This then paves the way for the remaking, or transformation of our minds spoken of by Paul in Rom. 12:2 above. Then we will be able to say along with him, “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal. 2:20).

Other spiritual sacrifices for the Christian include faith and service. Paul confirms this in his letter to the Philippians “But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you. So you too should be glad and rejoice with me” (Phil. 2:17–18). Paul sees the possibility here that his life of service may be like a sacrificial drink offering poured on top of the Philippians’ own sacrificial lives of faith and service.

Two chapters later, Paul thanks and commends the Philippians for their support of him through their material gifts. These, too, are seen as another example of Christian sacrifice: “I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God” (Phil. 4:18). Material support of those who have dedicated their lives to the work of the gospel are also accepted by God as pleasing sacrifices.

But perhaps the most delightful form of Christians sacrifice is proclaiming the Lord’s praises. The “first-fruits” of all we speak ought always to praise the Lord who created our tongues in the first place and continually gives us the breath of life: “Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name” (Heb. 13:15).

It is most significant to note that these sacrifices are made “through Jesus;” it is by means of His broken body and spilt blood that we now have access to the Most Holy Place. And once there we are now allowed to offer our own acceptable sacrifices. Once having offered this sacrifice of praise to the Father, we are to then turn to our fellow man and do good, sharing with those who

3. Rom. 6:6; Gal. 2:20, 5:24, 6:14.

stand in need: “And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased” (Heb. 13:16). This agrees with what Jesus said: “Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven” (Matt. 5:16). Instead of drawing attention to ourselves, our good deeds are to draw attention and praise to our Father in heaven, because He is the only one worthy of praise. Such good deeds are acceptable to God as sacrifices.

Not only Priests, but Kings as well

Revelation 20 says that this Christian priesthood will also function royally as kings: “they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years” (Rev. 20:6; see also 20:4; 3:21; 5:10). We discussed this king-priest combination under the Melchizedek priesthood in chapter 13. There we discovered that it was this combination of both king and priest in one person which marked off Jesus’ priesthood as being far superior than the Levitical priesthood. And now we see that Jesus has not only shared with us His priesthood, but also His royal kingship, *but only in the age to come*. This is further confirmed in Matt. 19:28, where Jesus tells His disciples, “I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel,” and also in the parable of the ten talents where Jesus commends the faithful steward, “ ‘Well done, my good servant! ...Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities’ and to the second [steward] ‘You take charge of five cities’ ” (Luke 19:17, 19).

It is important to note that in each one of these examples Jesus shares His rule with us only in the age to come, not before. Jesus readily acknowledged that He was in fact the King of the Jews (Matt. 27:11; Mark 15:2; Luke 23:3; John 18:37). But Jesus also acknowledged that His kingdom was not of this present world, “My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place” (John 18:36). In this present life we are His servants. If we are sufficiently humble and full of service here, He will invite us to share His rule in the life to come: “Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!” (Matt. 25:21). This is not only a further argument against a Melchizedek priesthood in this present Christian church age, but also an important argument against the several strains of dominion theology which teach that Christians are to rule the world under Christ *before* His second coming. Dominion theology is also a dangerous teaching and has pervaded many parts of the Christian church today.⁴

Summary and Conclusion

Through Jesus’ perfect and complete work of atonement on the cross, the believer now has access directly to the Most Holy Place, the abode of the Father. This privilege had previously been reserved only for Israel’s priesthood. Having thus freed us from our sins He has “made us to

4. Dominion theology teaches that Christ has mandated that Christians take over the structures of our present society until the whole world comes under His dominion—in *this age*. For an excellent analysis of dominion theology in the church today see Albert James Dager, *Vengeance is Ours: The Church in Dominion*, (Redmond, WA: Sword Publishers, 1990).

be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father” (Rev. 1:5b–6). And as priests, we are to offer acceptable sacrifices to God as well. But these sacrifices are not the blood sacrifices offered by the Levitical priesthood as atonement for sin. Jesus’ perfect atonement eliminated our sin problem “once for all” (Heb. 7:27). Instead, the Christian is to offer *spiritual* sacrifices (1 Peter 2:5). These include the living sacrifice of our bodies and minds (Rom. 12:1–2), our faith in God and service to others (Phil. 2:17), support of those whose lives are dedicated to gospel ministry (Phil. 4:18), praise of God—“the fruit of lips” (Heb. 13:15) and good deeds and material sharing with those in need for the sole purpose of glorifying God (Heb. 13:16). And if our present lives are sufficiently humble and full of service, He will invite us to share with Him His Kingly rule in the age to come (Matt. 25:21).

We conclude that if Joseph Smith had actually restored the priesthood of the early Christian church, it would have been the “priesthood of all believers” described above, since this *was* the priesthood of the early church, just as it is today. But this priesthood did not need to be restored—it had never left the earth. Instead of the Biblical priesthood of all believers, Joseph devised a convoluted hierarchy of offices, which attempts to put intermediaries between God and Christians. And this hierarchy actually denies the equal access God provided believers by the perfect work of His Son on the cross.