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Churches of Christ
Salute You
with a



*The Priesthood of Christ - -
Its Significance.*

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By E. R. Harper

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No church is stronger than its priesthood. If it is wrong the church is wrong, for around it centers the power, the strength, the value of any religion. The priesthood of Christ therefore is the very heart around which the Christian religion is built. It is one of if not the most important studies in the New Testament, for everything necessary to our salvation is centered around the Priesthood of Christ.

There are vital questions we need to understand with reference to the Priesthood of the Bible. The first is, How many different priesthoods has God given to man?

The Lord has given three priesthoods to mankind. All others are the inventions of man. The first was that known as the Patriarchal Priesthood. This for 2,500 years was the only priesthood known to man. It was called the Patriarchal Priesthood because the father officiated. In Gen. 12:7 Abraham erected an altar at Bethel and called upon the name of the Lord. In Gen. 14:17 is the account of Melchisedec who is called the "Priest of the Most High God". All these were before the giving of the Law of Moses and it was that priesthood under which men like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob approached God.

To the Gentile world this priesthood continued until the coming of the priesthood of Christ.

JEWISH PRIESTHOOD

After 2,500 years under one priesthood, God separated the children of Israel from the Gentiles, giving to them another priesthood. This was the Levitical Priesthood. In Numbers 17 is the selection of the tribe of Levi through Aaron. Moses commanded the children of Israel to bring him 12 rods, representing the 12 tribes of Israel. When Moses went into the Tabernacle of Witness, the rod of Aaron was budded. In Numbers 18:1 the Lord conferred the priesthood upon Aaron and his sons, with this warning in verse 7, "THE STRANGER THAT COMETH NIGH SHALL BE PUT TO DEATH".

Thus we see by this budding rod of Aaron's, God had selected Aaron and his sons as priests in the Jewish worship. No man dared take this unto himself who was not of the tribe of Levi and a descendant of Aaron, lest he die. This one point is significant in this study of the priesthoods of the Bible. Unless God makes you a HIGH PRIEST, to claim that office for yourself is to have the wrath of God meted out upon you. No man dare change it, or alter it. This is why a study in the Priesthoods of the Bible is of such vital importance. Just as this brought physical death then, to violate God's plans or to assume unlawfully the place of God's High Priest today, will mean spiritual death now.

This Levitical priesthood was also to last until the coming of the Priesthood of Christ. At that time both Jews and Gentiles were again to be united under one priesthood. Under these they have offered **only** the blood of animals. It was for this reason they had to give way to a **new** and **better** priesthood that man might have his sins forgiven.

THE PRIESTHOOD OF CHRIST

This brings us to our study of the Priesthood of Christ which is the third of the priesthoods given to man. This is sometimes referred to as the Melchisedec Priesthood. No such order exists in the **New Testament**. It is the Priesthood of Christ after the order of Melchisedec. Melchisedec was both "priest and King" at the same time, Heb. 7:1. There is no record where he inherited his priesthood from another, nor left it to a descendant. Just so with Christ; he was after this order rather than that of Aaron, for He too was both "priest and King" at the same time, Zech. 6:12. Christ did not inherit the office of priest. Neither will he hand it down to another.

Under the priesthood of Christ He is the only High priest, and every Christian is a common priest with no orders or ranks among them. They make up the royal, spiritual priesthood spoken of by Peter in 1 Peter 2:5-9. The reason for this change of priesthoods is given in Heb. 7:11-12, "If therefore **PERFECTION** were by the Levitical priesthood, what further need was there that **ANOTHER PRIEST** should rise after the order of Melchisedec, and **not** be called after the order of Aaron? For the **PRIESTHOOD BEING CHANGED**, there is made of **NECESSITY** a change also of the law."

This **FOREVER** forbids the Aaronic Priesthood's being in force during the priesthood of Christ. This **NEW PRIESTHOOD** is that of Christ and is the **LAST** ever to be given to man, for it can bring **PERFECTION, SALVATION, FORGIVENESS OF SINS** to the lost of this earth. Man therefore needs no other. In this priesthood all mankind is again brought together under one priesthood. It is the golden age, the **SUN LIGHT DISPENSATION** of God to man. To reject the blessings offered to man by this priesthood is to forever be lost, for Paul says in Heb. 10:26, "For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth **NO MORE SACRIFICE FOR SINS**." This sacrifice made by Christ for our sins is absolutely the very last. That is why you **MUST UNDERSTAND CORRECTLY** how to obtain these blessings made possible by Christ, our High Priest.

THE QUALIFICATIONS

The first of our questions has now been answered. There have been three systems of priesthoods: the Patriarchal, the Jewish, and the Priesthood of Christ. Our next question is, What are the qualifications for this New Priesthood?

To become the High Priest of God under this new system one had to be "without sin" In Heb. 4:14-15 the writer says;

"We have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, who was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin". There lives not a man among us who possesses these qualifications. This is why the churches of Christ do not have men posing as God's high priests today. None of us has ever lived "without sin" and not one of us has ever gone into the "heavens".

Again to qualify as the High Priest under this New Order one had to "die for the sins of the people". In Heb. 2:9 we read, "he was crowned with glory and honour; that he might taste death for every man." "He became obedient unto death, even the death, of the cross," Phil. 2:8. Unless I have died on the Roman Cross for every man, I cannot qualify as the High Priest of God. No man but the Christ has ever so done, therefore no man save the Christ can ever be the High Priest of God. Under the Levitical Priesthood God had only ONE OFFICIATING HIGH PRIEST AT THE TIME. Under this new system he has only one High Priest, and he tells us who he is, CHRIST JESUS OUR LORD. This eliminates every man on earth from qualifying as God's High Priest.

To become the High Priest of God under this new order, one had to "bear the sins of the people". Peter in 1 Pet. 2:22-24, says this of Christ, "Who his own self BARE OUR SINS IN HIS OWN BODY ON THE TREE, that WE, being DEAD TO SINS, should LIVE UNTO RIGHTEOUSNESS." Such passages are all you need to prove that no man today can qualify as God's High Priest. What man among us has ever died on the tree to bear our sins in his own body? What man among us poor humans of this earth would dare say we have NEVER SINNED and that no GUILT was ever found in our mouths? These are some of the reasons why churches of Christ do not claim to have High Priests of God on earth. No man but the Christ has ever been or will ever be able to so qualify and for us to claim such a high and exalted position on earth would, to us, be taking unto ourselves an honour bestowed upon Christ alone. We would have to claim perfection; to be as good as Christ, if we are to be God's HIGH PRIESTS in this new order.

Therefore we are made to believe by this study of the Bible that the qualifications of the High Priest are so great that all orders of human earthly priesthods are forbidden.

THE PURPOSE OF THIS PRIESTHOOD

The proper understanding of the purpose of the priesthood of Christ, we believe, prohibits any man among us from being a high priest of God. No man today can fulfill the purpose designed by the Father for the office of High Priest. His purpose was to become our "sin offering". In Heb. 5:26-27 Paul says, "For such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens, who needed not daily as those high priests (those under the law) to OFFER up sacrifices, first for his own sins, and then for the people's: for this he did ONCE, when he offered up himself." What man among us can claim to have all his life lived "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners and exalted higher than the heavens"? What man among us has off-

ered himself up for the sins of the people as has the Christ? Unless we have, we cannot claim to be God's High Priest on earth.

Another purpose of the High Priest is found in Heb. 2:17. It reads, "Wherefore in all things it behooved him to be made like unto his brethren, THAT he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make RECONCILIATION FOR THE SINS OF THE PEOPLE." Has any man among us ever done this? Then he is not God's High Priest.

Another purpose was to "make intercession for us" "to save us to the uttermost". Heb. 7:25. Who is able to do this? Only Christ our High Priest.

The last to which I call your attention concerning the purpose of this priesthood is, he came to "obtain eternal redemption for us". In Heb. 9:11-12 the writer speaking of Christ says, "By his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, HAVING OBTAINED ETERNAL REDEMPTION FOR US."

This sums up the purpose of God's High Priest under the third, the Priesthood of Christ. This eliminates all men from the office of High Priest, for not one of us, by our own blood, has entered into heaven or can enter to obtain man's eternal redemption from sin.

HOW LONG IS THIS TO LAST?

Our next question is, How long will Christ's priesthood last? In Heb. 5:6 it says; "Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchisedec," and in Heb. 7:24 Paul says, "BUT THIS MAN (CHRIST) because he CONTINUETH EVER hath an UNCHANGEABLE PRIESTHOOD." In Heb. 5:4 the writer lays down the ONE argument that forever blights all efforts of man to create a system of priestcraft by which men may receive remission of sins. Paul says, "No man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God as was Aaron". Then he said, "So also Christ glorified not himself to be made an high priest, but he (that is, God) said unto him, Thou art my Son, today have I begotten thee. "Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchisedec." God made Christ this High Priest. How long is Christ to be High Priest? "Forever" with an "unchangeable priesthood".

Since God in this new order has only one HIGH PRIEST AT THE TIME and his office is forever and unchangeable, I ask this very pointed question, Whence cometh all the various orders of PRIESTCRAFT today, all claiming to be "called of God as was Aaron"? Friends, Christ would either have to die or surrender his priestly office before one could serve as High Priest. This, the Bible shows, he will never do. For me to claim, therefore, the office of a High Priest would be to take unto myself an honour that God alone has bestowed upon his Son Christ Jesus and that forever.

OVER WHAT IS CHRIST THE HIGH PRIEST?

I trust the importance of our next question may be properly evaluated. Over what is Christ the High Priest? Here is the danger spot in our religious thinking. In Heb. 10:21 Paul says, "And having an high priest OVER THE HOUSE OF GOD, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith." Who may draw near in full assurance of faith? Only the House of God over which Christ is the High Priest. Paul says in 1 Tim. 3:15 the "house of God is the church of the living God." Hence Christ is the "high priest over the church." To enjoy the blessings made possible by Christ, the High Priest, we must therefore be in the church, for it is over the church he sits and officiates as God's High Priest. The blessings therefore to be enjoyed by God's High Priest are limited only to those in his house, the church.

The High Priest is the one who talks to God for us. The prophets talked to us for God, but not so with the High Priest. He is our spokesman to God. This is why you must be in his house, his church. Unless you can save yourself, unless you can be saved apart from Christ, our high priest, our spokesman, then you must be in his church where he can speak for you. To die out of that church is to die outside the blessings made possible by Christ our High Priest, for said he, through Paul, in Eph. 2:16, we are "reconciled unto God by the cross in one body", which is the church. To share in his blessings you must know where to find Christ, the High Priest. You have found him now. He is over the church as her high priest. Whatever it takes to come into that church, that is what it takes to be saved, for it is the church that shall be "presented to Christ" at his coming, Eph. 5:27.

This brings to our minds the question, When did these blessings by our High Priest become effective? In Heb. 10:19-20 Paul says, Christ had "Boldness to enter into the holiest by the BLOOD OF CHRIST, by a NEW and LIVING WAY, which he hath consecrated for us through the veil, that is to say his flesh." That is, by his death. There is no doubt therefore as to the time when all of this is to begin. Christ had to die, and by his blood enter into heaven and present himself before the Father as the "sin offering for the world". It was by this He perfected a NEW WAY, a LIVING WAY, a way by which men could actually receive remission of sins and have the promise of a resurrection from the dead and hope of life eternal.

ERRORS ELIMINATED

Before we begin the study of "errors eliminated", this one final thought concerning the priesthood of Christ. Paul says in Heb. 8:4, "If he were on earth he would not be a priest." This eliminates forever any High Priest under this third priesthood serving as such on earth. This places his priestly office in heaven. His being a king while priest, Zech. 6:12, places his

throne also in heaven. Hence He is today both "king and priest". As I said before, this eliminates all possibility of his ever being king upon this earth.

From our study thus far we find the following theories which we believe are eliminated: 1. It eliminates all orders of earthly priesthood. 2. It eliminates the possibility of two priesthoods existing at the same time, for the priesthood of Aaron had to give way before Christ could become our high priest, Heb. 4:12. 3. It defeats the common belief that man is saved out of the church, for Christ is High Priest over the church. 4. It destroys all theories that place the beginning of the church and remission of sins by the blood of Christ BEFORE the death of Christ. 5. It shows clearly that salvation through Christ the High Priest had to begin after Christ entered into the holiest of all having made reconciliation for our sins through his flesh. 6. It refutes the idea that God has separate plans for his people, for all are brought together again under one priesthood, that of Christ, and are reconciled alike unto God by the cross in one body, the church. Eph. 2:16; Eph. 3:6. 7. It refutes the future reign of Christ on earth, for Zech. 6:12 declares Christ would be a "priest upon his throne". Since he could not be a priest on earth, Heb. 8:4, but is priest while on his throne, it follows as the night the day he can never be king on this earth. Since he is priest now, it stands without controversy that he is king now and reigning on David's throne. 8. It refutes the theory of "salvation by faith only" because for man to share in the blessings of the priesthood of Christ he must be in the church over which Christ officiates as God's high priest and for him to enter that church he must be baptized, 1 Cor. 12:13.

The closing question for our consideration is, "How did men in the first century become members of this church over which Christ is High Priest?" In Acts chapter two, we find the answer. Christ has now presented himself before the Father. It is Pentecost. The apostles are preaching. The people, cut to their hearts, ask Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Men and brethren, What shall we do?" Peter gives a simple answer, "Repent and be baptized EVERY ONE OF YOU in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." In verse 41 they were baptized and 3,000 were added. In verse 47 "the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved." To what church were they added? It could have been only one: the church the Lord built. Mt. 16:18. If you will do just what they did, it will make you a member of the same church. If not, why not? This

is what churches of Christ believe and preach all over the world. In that church you will have Christ as your High Priest and through his precious blood your sins may be forgiven. You should study therefore to know the truth of this subject, for your soul is too precious to be lost. Let no man cause you to believe that the TRADITIONS of the church or MODERN revelations are better or just as good as the precious book the Bible. They all want us to believe they accept the Bible as a "revelation from God". If it is, then traditions, modern revelations, must not contradict this admitted revelation from God. If so, this is a false revelation or the others are false and the invention of the minds of men. Revelations from God must not conflict. Study this precious old book, the Bible; believe her sacred pages; abide by her instructions; and the word of the Lord will safely anchor you on the other side where your High Priest, Christ the Lord, will be waiting for you, IF you are in his house over which he officiates as your high priest.

(Radio log omitted for corrections)