

THE WORK OF CHRIST AND THE LIFE OF THE CHRISTIAN (8)

The Priestly Work of the Christian

A. Introduction

1. The work of Christ is the term that is used to describe all Christ did when He came to earth to save us by dying on the cross, all that He is doing now that He has risen from the dead and ascended to God's right hand, and all that He will do when He returns.

Throughout the history of the church, Christians have spoken of Christ's work in His roles as a Prophet, as a Priest, and as a King.

2. However, the roles of prophet, priest and king, not only are a helpful way of understanding the work of Christ, they are also a helpful way of understanding the life of a Christian.

Christians imitate Christ in each of these roles, albeit in a lesser way.

"Remember this: The work of Christ and the life of a Christian can be summed up in three words – "prophet", "priest", and "king." (Kevin DeYoung)

3. To help us understand what the Bible teaches about the work of Christ and the life of the Christian as prophet, priest, and king, we're going to use some of the different theological tools which are at our disposal.

Exegetical Theology Tool: we use this tool when we study and seek to understand individual texts of the Bible.

Biblical Theology Tool: we use this tool when we trace how a theme develops and progresses through the Bible from Genesis to Revelation.

Systematic Theology Tool: we use this tool when we sum up what the whole Bible teaches on a specific doctrine.

Pastoral (or Practical) Theology Tool: we use this tool when we apply what we learn to the life of the church and individual Christians.

4. A priest is someone who mediates between God and people.

As mediators, the priests interceded for the people of Israel.

They represented God's people by offering sacrifices and praying prayers for them.

Then having represented God's people by offering their sacrifices and prayers, they then represented God to the people by ministering to them as they taught God's Word to them and pronounced God's blessing on them.

5. In the beginning God created all human beings to be priests.

To extend the worship of God by showing others how wonderful it is to be in relationship with God as they lived under His rule and enjoyed His blessing.

Adam was the first to occupy this role as he worked (serve or worship) in the garden-temple, and took care of it by protecting it (that is, keeping Satan out of the garden).

Once sin entered the world, the relationship between God and humanity changed. Adam and Eve are driven out of God's presence and now for them to have any kind of relationship with God, altars must be built and sacrifices offered by priests to bring people into a state of holiness.

With the establishment of Israel, the role of priest, like that of prophet and king, became an official office. Individuals were set apart from the family of Aaron in the tribe of Levi to serve as mediators between God and people.

However, this did not mean that there was no priestly role for all of God's people.

Israel were supposed to be a kingdom of priests, to extend the worship of God by showing to the nations the wonder of being in relationship with God under His rule and blessing. Yet rather than drawing the nations to worship God, Israel failed to live as a priestly people, and a major reason for this was the failure of Israel's priests.

None of these priests could perform their work perfectly and none of them could restore God's people to what they were meant to be.

What was needed was a greater priest and a greater priesthood, and in Jesus, this greater priest in the order of a greater priesthood, came.

6. Jesus did His work as priest, by firstly, offering up a better sacrifice for His people.

"But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him." (Hebrews 9:26-28)

Then after His ascension to heaven, Jesus continues to do His priestly work by interceding for His people – as He advocates for them, prays for them, helps them, and blesses them.

"Now there have been many of those priests, since death prevented them from continuing in office; but because Jesus lives for ever, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them." (Hebrews 7:23-25)

7. Jesus also, secondly, does His work as priest, by changing His people so they would be a light to the nations, restoring the priestly role they were created to have.

"Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God. Since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool, because by one sacrifice he has made perfect for ever those who are being made holy." (Hebrews 10:11-14)

This is why those who have been saved by Jesus, are called priests.

"As you come to him, the living Stone – rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him – you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." (1 Peter 2:4-5)

"But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light." (1 Peter 2:9)

"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 the glory and power for ever and ever! Amen." (Revelation 1:5-6)

"You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth." (Revelation 5:10)

"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." (Revelation 20:6)

As priests, they are able to enter into God's presence to offer worship to Him.

"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, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.” (Hebrews 10:19-22)

“Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise – the fruit of lips that confess his name. And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.” (Hebrews 13:15-16)

8. One day God’s people will do this perfectly.

In the new heaven and new earth, we will continually offer in worship everything that we are and have and do to God.

“No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.” (Revelation 22:3-4)

9. What does this priestly work in the life of Christians look like now? What does it mean to be a royal priesthood?

Heidelberg Catechism (Q32):

Q. Why are you called a Christian?

A. Because I am a member of Christ by faith and thus share in his anointing, so that I may as prophet confess his name, as priest present myself a living sacrifice of thankfulness to him...”

B. The Priestly Work of the Body of Christ

1. The church now has priestly role in extending the worship of God.

To serve God by calling the nations to worship Him.

“Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth. Worship the LORD with gladness; come before him with joyful songs.” (Psalm 100:1-2)

“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.” (1 Peter 2:9)

To model to the nations how wonderful it is to be in relationship with God under His rule and enjoying His blessing.

“Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.” (1 Peter 2:11-12)

The primary place where this happens is the gathering of the church to worship God on the Lord’s Day.

It is at this gathering that we offer sacrifices of praise to God for the sacrifice of His Son, Jesus Christ, with our lips and lives, we pray for all people, are taught from God’s Word how to live holy lives (make distinctions), and receive God’s blessing.

“I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone.” (1 Timothy 2:1)

“Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching.” (1 Timothy 4:13)

2. To help the church in this task of extending the worship of God, Jesus gives to the church leaders and teachers who provide assistance.

By calling God's people to worship (Call to Worship).

By overseeing the worship service.

By leading them in various prayers.

By teaching God's Word (Sermon).

By fencing the table at the Lord's Supper.

By pronounce over the church God's blessing (Benediction).

By making themselves available when members of the church need spiritual help and counsel.

"Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise. Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well: the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned he will be forgiven." (James 5:13-15)

C. The Priestly Work of the Believer in Christ

1. The individual Christian now has a priestly role too by offering themselves to God as sacrifices – living sacrifices.

"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." (Romans 12:1)

We are to give our whole lives to God to use as He pleases.

Everything we are. Everything we have. Everything we do. We are to hold nothing back.

"Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your body." (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)

"Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men." (Colossians 3:23)

"So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God." (1 Corinthians 10:31)

"And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." (Colossians 3:16-17)

2. There are a number of specific ways that individual Christians carry out their priestly role.

By doing good works.

"And so not forgot to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased." (Hebrews 13:16)

By praying for others.

"Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed." (James 5:16)

By proclaiming the gospel to others.

"I have written to you quite boldly on some points, as if to remind you of them again, because of the grace God gave me to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles with the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit." (Romans 15:15-16)