

WHO IS JESUS CHRIST? - THE OFFICES OF CHRIST

The Scriptures ascribe a threefold office of Christ, viz. Prophetic (Deut.18: 15; Lk.4: 18-21; Lk.13: 33; Acts 3: 22), Priestly (Ps.110: 4; Heb.3:1; 4:14-15; 5: 5-6; 6: 20; 7: 26; 8: 1) and Kingly (Isa.9: 6-7; Ps.2: 6; 45: 6; 110: 1-2; Lk.1: 33; Jhn.18: 36-37; Heb.1: 8; I Pet.1: 11; Rev.19: 16). Man was originally intended for this threefold work but lost it through sin although certain O.T. individuals as types of Christ displayed it, e.g. Joseph, Moses, David. It has been restored by Christ to believers (Acts 11: 27-28; 21: 10-11; Rev.1: 6 & 5: 10).

THE PROPHETIC OFFICE:

The O.T. uses three words to designate a prophet, viz. *Nabhi*, *ro'eh*, and *chozeh*. *Nabhi* designates one who comes with a message from God to the people, while *ro'eh* and *chozeh* stress the fact that the prophet is one who receives revelations from God, particularly in the form of visions. In the N.T. the word *prophetes* is used and does not mean "to speak beforehand", but "to speak forth". The prophet is one who speaks forth from God. A prophet, then, is one who receives revelations, who is in God's service, particularly as a messenger, and who speaks in His name.

There are two elements combined in the prophetic function, viz. The passive or receptive, and the active or productive (Ex.7: 1; Deut.18: 18). The prophet receives divine revelation in dreams, visions or verbal communications and passes these on to the people, either orally, or visibly in prophetic actions (Num.12: 6-8; Isa.6; Jer.1: 4-10; Ezek.3: 1-4 & 17). The passive controls the active, for without receiving the prophet cannot give, and he cannot give more than he receives. One who receives revelations is not necessarily a prophet, e.g. Abimelech, Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar. What constitutes the office of a prophet is the divine calling, the instruction to communicate the divine revelation to others.

It was the duty of the prophets to reveal the will of God to the people, to call them back to God when they went astray, to announce His judgement and to declare His promises. They typified Christ (Deut.18: 15; Acts 3: 22-24). In fulfilling His office as Prophet, Christ claimed to bring His Father's message (Jhn.8: 26-28; 12: 49-50), proclaimed His message to the people (Matt.4: 17), and foretold future events (Matt.24-25; Lk.19: 41-44). He continues to exercise His office as Prophet in "revealing to us, by His word (Jhn.16: 12-15) and Spirit (I Pet.1: 10-11) the will of God for our salvation" (*Westminster Shorter Catechism, Q.24*).

THE PRIESTLY OFFICE:

The O.T. word for priest is *kohen*. The word *chemarim* is sometimes used of idolatrous priests. The N.T. word is *hiereus*. The distinctions between a prophet and a priest are:

- The prophet is God's representative with the people while the priest is the people's representative with God.
- The prophet spoke and acted on behalf of God while the priest spoke and acted on behalf of the people.
- The prophets emphasized moral and spiritual duties, responsibilities and privileges while the priest stressed ritual observances.

The characteristics and functions of a priest according to Heb.5: 1 are:

- He is taken from among men to be their representative.
- He is active in the interests of men in things that pertain to God.
- His special work is to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins.
- He is called of God (v.4).
- He also made intercession for the people (Heb.7: 25).
- He also blessed the people in the Name of God (Lev.9: 22).

Christ is referred to as a priest in Ps.110: 4; Zech.6: 13; Heb.3: 1; 4: 14; 5: 5; 6: 20; 7: 26; 8: 1. The priestly work of Christ is twofold:

- To offer an all-sufficient sacrifice for the sin of the world.
- To intercede for those for whom He has made atonement.

We will discuss this twofold priestly work of Christ under the headings of the **Atonement** and **Intercession**, but here we will look at the meaning of the word "sacrifice" and discuss its typology.

The Scriptural meaning of "Sacrifice": The sacrifice appears in the first act of worship (Gen.4: 3-4), and is approved and accepted by God. The practice was clearly of divine appointment as God Himself shed the blood of animals and provided Adam and Eve with the animal skins for a covering (Gen.3: 21). Its intention was therefore to be expiatory or atoning ("covering"). The fundamental idea then in the slaying of the sacrificial animal was that of vicarious atonement for the sins of the offerer.

Various interpretations have been given of the O.T. sacrifices as follows:

- *The Gift Theory* - They were gifts to please God, to express gratitude to Him, or to placate His wrath.
- *The Sacramental-Communion Theory* - They were essentially sacrificial meals symbolising the communion of man with God.
- *The Homage Theory* - They were divinely appointed means of confessing the heinousness of sin.
- *The Symbol Theory* - They were symbolic expressions of communion with God.
- *The Piacular Theory* - They are expiatory or atoning. This is the true Scriptural meaning.

The Typology of the Sacrifice: The O.T. sacrifices prefigured the vicarious sufferings of Jesus Christ and His atoning death (Ps.40: 6-8; Heb.10: 5-9; Col.2: 17; Heb.9: 23-24; 10: 1; 13: 11-12; II Cor.5: 21; Gal.3: 13; I Jhn.1: 7. The striking thing about the priestly work of Christ is that *He is both priest and sacrifice* (Heb.5: 1-10; 7: 1-28; 9: 11-15 & 24-28; 10: 11-14 & 19-22; 12: 24; Rom.3: 24-25; 5: 6-8; I Cor.5: 7; 15: 3; Eph.5: 2; Jhn.1: 29; 3: 14-15; I Jhn.2: 2; 4: 10). The symbol of the brazen serpent is significant. As the brazen serpent signified the removal of the plague, so the lifting up of the Cross effected the removal of sin. And as a believing look at the serpent brought healing, so faith in Christ heals to the saving of the soul (I Pet.2: 24; 3: 18; Mk.10: 45).

When compared to the priests of the O.T. who were merely shadows and types, Christ may be called the only *real* priest (Heb.7) whose priesthood is vastly superior to that of Aaron, "Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek" (Gen.14: 18; Ps.110: 4; Heb.6: 20; 7: 11-17).

Among the sacrifices and ceremonies of the Tabernacle and the later Temple service was the Day of Atonement (*yom kippur*) held on the 10th day of the 7th month (Tishri, Sept./Oct.). This was Israel's most solemn holy day. It reminded Israel that all the daily, weekly and monthly sacrifices were not sufficient to atone for sin. On that day the High Priest performed the following ritual according to Leviticus chapter 16 while the people "stood afar off" (refer to the attached sketch of the Tabernacle):

- He entered alone into the Holy Place, and having divested himself of his garments of "Glory and Beauty" (Ex.28: 2-43), he washed himself and arrayed himself in simple linen garments.
- He then slew a bullock as a sin-offering for himself and his house and, filling his censer with live coals from the Incense Altar and taking incense in his hand, he entered through the Veil into the Most Holy Place. There he placed the incense on the coals so that the smoke which arose covered the Mercy Seat (which was the lid of the Ark of the Covenant) and hid it from his view lest he died.
- He then withdrew from the Most Holy Place and, collecting some of the blood of the sin-offering, he returned to sprinkle it eastwards upon the Mercy Seat and before the Ark upon the ground seven times. Thus, atonement was made for the priesthood.
- The High Priest then returned to the Outer Court and slew the he-goat that had been selected by lot for the sin-offering of the people. Taking its blood, he re-entered the Most Holy Place and sprinkled it as before, thus making atonement for the sins of the congregation and also making atonement for the Most Holy Place itself as well as the Tabernacle.
- He then returned to the Outer Court, and going to the Brazen Altar he made atonement for it by sprinkling of the mixed blood of the bullock and goat upon it with his finger seven times, after he had first anointed the Horns of the Altar with the blood.
- He then took the live goat, called the "Scapegoat", and laying both of his hands upon its head, he confessed the sins of the people thus placing them upon the head of the Scapegoat. The Scapegoat was then sent by a "fit man" into the wilderness, into a land uninhabited, where it was left, thus carrying away the sin of the people.
- He then returned to the Holy Place and took off his linen garments, washed and robed himself in his garments of "Beauty and Glory", and returned to the court of the

Tabernacle where he offered a ram for himself and a ram for the people as a burnt offering. The fat of the sin-offering was also burnt on the altar at this time.

- The bullock and the goat which were the sin-offerings were then carried outside the camp and completely burnt in fire.

Let us now apply the work of the High Priest to Jesus Christ:

- When Jesus forsook His Heavenly Glory to come into the world as a man (Phil.2: 5-8), He laid aside His garments of "Glory and Beauty" and put on the "Linen garment" of human flesh in which to minister.
- He had no occasion to offer incense in the Most Holy Place, or to offer a bullock as a sin-offering for Himself, for He was sinless, but He had to offer a sin-offering for the world.
- It is here that we see that no single offering could typify the work of Christ, for Christ's work is twofold: first, He died as a sin-offering for **SIN**, and second He rose from the dead and ascended through the veil of the cloud (Acts 1: 9) into the Holy of Holies of the Heavenly Tabernacle and offered **HIS OWN BLOOD** as an atonement for the sin of the world (Heb.4: 14; 9: 24). This could only be foreshadowed by the use of two goats - the first was made a sin-offering and as such had to die, the second was called the "Scapegoat" and bore away the sins of the people into the wilderness (Lev.16: 8-10 & 20-22).
- The High Priest entered into the Most Holy Place once a year with the blood of others, but Jesus Christ our High Priest entered once for all with His **OWN BLOOD** into the Holy of Holies of Heaven itself (Heb.9: 11-12 & 24-26).
- Christ is still engaged in High Priestly work in that He tarries throughout this "great day of atonement", but at its close He will lay aside His High Priestly robes and come forth in His Kingly dress of "Glory and Beauty" to rule as King of Kings.
- There was no provision made for sitting down in the Tabernacle or Temple for there was no time for sitting down as sacrifices were continuously being offered; But Jesus our High Priest offered the sacrifice of Himself "**ONCE FOR ALL**", and then "**SAT DOWN**" at the right hand of God, on God's Throne (Heb.12: 2) which is the "Throne of Grace" today (Heb.4: 16).

ATONEMENT:

The doctrine of the Atonement is the heart of the Gospel. The word means "a making at one" of those who are separated and estranged. The penalty of a broken law must fall upon the offender or a substitute or bondman. When Adam sinned man had to pay the penalty which was death (eternal separation from God), but God, in His love and mercy provided a substitute for man in Himself (Jesus Christ). When the time came for God to offer Himself as a sacrifice on behalf of man, divine justice presented Him with the "bond", executed centuries before, and demanded its payment. As Christ was nailed to the cross He held that bond, unseen to human eyes, in His hand (Col.2: 13-14). By the cancellation of the "bond" the law and the justice of God were satisfied and it was possible for God to "Be **JUST** and the **JUSTIFIER** of them who believe in Jesus" (Rom.3: 26).

But how could an innocent person assume the guilt of another? This can only be done by the innocent person entering into "corporate oneness" with the guilty person and thus becoming identified with him, e.g. the debts of a poor widow could not be justly charged up to a millionaire neighbour, but if he entered into "corporate oneness" with her by marrying her and thus assuming all her obligations, then he could justly and legally be held responsible for the debts (Rom.7: 4).

The Atonement, then, was absolutely necessary for it was the only way in which God could pardon sin and at the same time satisfy His justice. It is usually spoken of as a "vicarious atonement" because Christ acted as our "vicar" or "substitute". When man fell away from God, he was faced with the penalty of eternal death. This is what God would have required in strict justice if it were not for His love and compassion for the sinner. So God appointed a vicar in Jesus Christ to take man's place and He atoned for man's sin and obtained eternal life for man. The following differences between personal and vicarious atonement should be noted:

- Personal atonement is provided by the offending party; vicarious atonement by the offended party.
- Personal atonement excludes mercy; vicarious atonement represents the highest form of mercy.
- Personal atonement would have been forever in the making and hence could not result in redemption; vicarious atonement is settled forever and brings reconciliation and eternal life.

Some hold to a limited extent of the atonement saying that Christ died only for the elect, but Christ did not die to save only a few individuals. He died to pay the penalty of Adam's disobedience which was death (eternal separation from God). He died to redeem the human race from the curse of sin, but this does not mean "universal salvation" for although Christ made salvation available to all, the individual's actual redemption is dependent upon his faith in the finished work of Christ. This is not a matter of men "choosing" to be saved when they hear the Gospel, but of responding by faith to the "call" of Christ to Himself via the convicting power of His Spirit. We will consider the doctrine of the Atonement in more detail in a separate paper.

INTERCESSION:

Christ presently continues His priestly work in Heaven as an "intercessor". This word comes from the Greek *parakletos* and denotes one who is called in for aid, an advocate, one who pleads the cause of another and also gives him wise counsel. The word is often translated as "comforter", but this is only its secondary sense. It is only found in Jhn.14: 16 & 26; 15: 26; 26: 7; I Jhn.2: 1, and from these verses we see that there are really two Advocates - Christ and the Holy Spirit. Christ pleads the believer's cause with the Father (Heb.7: 25; I Jhn.2: 1) while the Holy Spirit pleads the cause of believers against the world (Jhn.16: 8) and also pleads the cause of Christ with believers and serves them with wise counsel (Jhn.14: 26; 15: 26; 16: 14). Christ, then, pleads our cause with God, while the Holy Spirit pleads God's cause with us.

The intercessory work of Christ was symbolised by the daily burning of incense on the Golden Altar in the Holy Place, the constantly rising cloud of incense typifying the high-priestly prayer of our great High Priest. The burning of incense on the Golden Altar (also called the Altar of Incense) was closely connected with the sacrifices of the Brazen Altar. The fact that the incense might be burned only on living coals taken from the altar of burnt-offering was an indication of the fact that the intercession was based on the sacrifice and would be effective in no other way. This clearly indicates that the intercessory work of Christ in heaven is based on His accomplished sacrificial work and is acceptable only on that basis.

THE KINGLY OFFICE:

Christ is King over all the universe by virtue of the fact that He is God. However, when we speak of His Kingly Office we refer more especially to His Kingship as Messiah. The prophecies of the Kingly Messiah find their fulfillment in Christ in two stages:

- They were fulfilled in principle in His First Coming when God established His Kingdom among men (Matt.3: 2; Lk.17: 20-21).
- They will be fulfilled in reality at His Second Coming when all His enemies are made His footstool and His universal dominion over everything "in heaven and on earth and under the earth" is established (Matt.6: 10; 20: 21; Lk.23: 42).

NAME:.....

ADDRESS:.....

.....

DATE:.....

CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY
(PAPER 007F)

WHO IS JESUS CHRIST? - THE OFFICES OF CHRIST

Questions:

1. Can you name some Old Testament characters who could be said to have held the offices of prophet, priest and king at least in a typological sense?
2. Briefly state the difference between a prophet and a priest.
3. What is the idea behind the sacrificial system in the Bible?
4. What is the significance of the scapegoat in Leviticus chapter 16?
5. What is the basic meaning of the word "atonement"?
6. What office does Jesus Christ currently hold in heaven?