

Theology for Life

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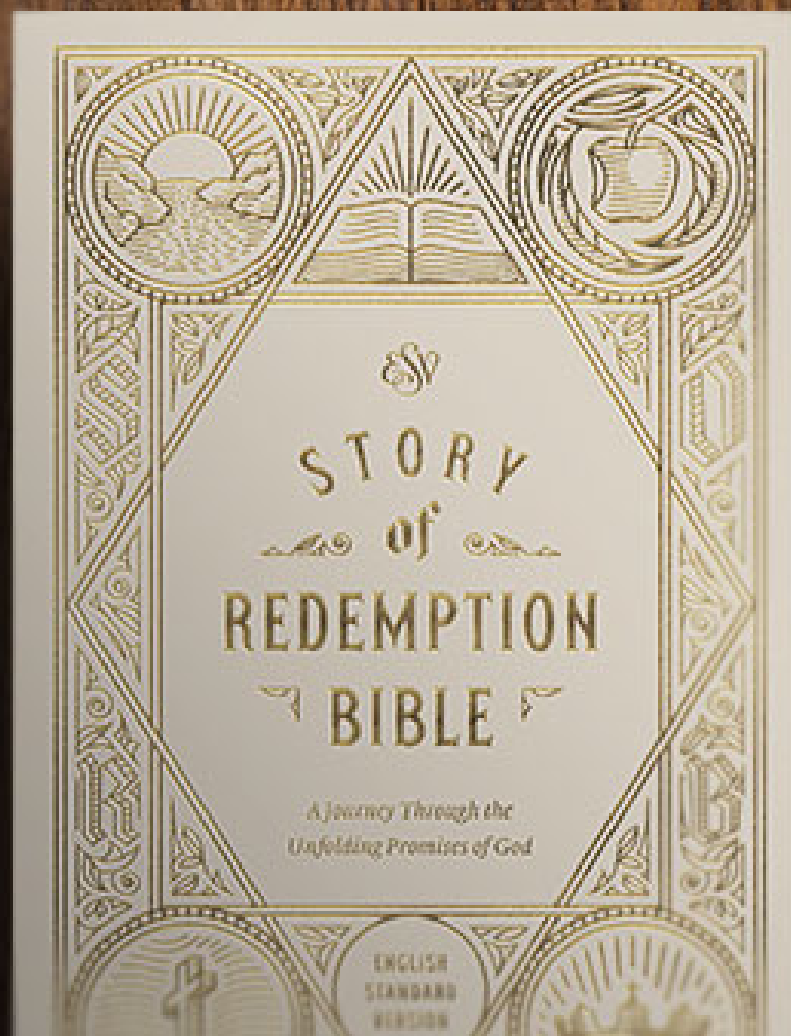
The High Priestly Ministry of **JESUS**

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- **Jesus, Our Great Intercessor**

❑❑ CROSSWAY

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Editor's Corner

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The High Priestly ministry of Jesus is a tremendous blessing and encouragement to the Christian. As we come to study this subject, let's understand the heartbeat of the author of Hebrew's argument. The book of Hebrews is written to people facing intense suffering, and is meant to encourage them in their suffering. The writer focuses on the superiority of Christ over everything, and in all things. In his teaching about Jesus as High Priest in two particular places are the focus of this editorial as this entire issue of *Theology for Life* will further explore this critical topic. These two aspects of the High Priestly ministry of Jesus are found in Hebrews 2:17-18 and Hebrews 4:14-16.

- Hebrews 2:17-18: *"Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted."*
- Hebrews 4:14-16: *"Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."*

The author of Hebrews explains in these two passages that Christ suffered. He was tempted and can help those who now are tempted because He experienced what they did, but did not sin. What's often missed is that this is all because of what He did for us. Hebrews 2:17 says, "[Jesus made a] propitiation for the sins of the people" (Hebrews 2:17). Propitiation deals with the wrath of God, while expiation removes the wrath of God. At the cross, Jesus not only dealt a death blow to Satan's kingdom, but fully and finally satisfied the wrath of God because of Christ's finished work. It's because of this work that Christians have a High Priest, who understands them when they are tempted.

The author of Hebrews also explains that Christians have

a High Priest who is able to “sympathize with our weakness, but one who in every respect has been tempted, as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15). The point is made again by the author of Hebrews, as we discussed in the previous paragraph for emphasis. The biblical writer often repeats things because he wants readers to pay attention to the point he is making. Jesus is *unlike* us in that He is sinless and fully God and fully man. But Jesus is *like* us in that He was tempted in every way, but never sinned. Now why does this matter?

Well, you and I face temptation every day. We face temptations towards gossip, gluttony, sexual sin, anger, bitterness, resentment, and the list could go on and on. Jesus knows His own and His own know Him. He sees them and loves them because He cares for them. And it’s because of His finished and sufficient work that we, as Christians, can “hold fast our confession” (Hebrews 4:14) and “draw near to the throne of grace” (Hebrews 4:16) to “receive help and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:16).

For the Christian, that requirement of the help through the grace of God is down to the nano-second. At every time and in every phase of life, we need help from God. We need the help of the Holy Spirit to grow in Him. We need the help of the grace of God to come before His throne. We need the help of the grace of God to face the day. This is what the author of Hebrews is saying: that the help we need is available to us now in Christ, who is our High Priest. He understands us because He knows and loves us. He, who created us, is also our Lord. And He is our High Priest—the one, dear Christian, that you are invited to come before. It is not a throne of judgment, but of grace. So, go to the throne of the grace of God, knowing you are fully loved and accepted by the Lord, who longs to hear your prayers and listens to them.

In this issue of *Theology for Life*, we are looking at the high priestly ministry of Jesus. We put this issue together to help you grow in understanding of this vital topic. It is such a neglected topic, and it has so much to help us understand Christ’s ministry towards the Christian.

Our prayer as you read this issue is that you will, not only grow in your understanding of this subject, but that it will cause you to grow in the grace of God and worship the Lord.

In Christ Alone,
Dave Jenkins
Executive Editor, *Theology for Life Magazine*

Tri-perspectivalism: How This Concept Impacts the Church

An Interview with John Frame

By Dave Jenkins



John Frame serves as J.D. Trimble Chair of Systematic Theology and Philosophy at Reformed Theological Seminary, Orlando.

T4L: Today we are interviewing Dr. John Frame. Thank you very much for agreeing to do this interview with *Theology for Life Magazine*, Dr. Frame. Can you tell us a bit about your life, marriage, and ministry?

Dr. Frame: I was born in Pittsburgh in 1939, received Jesus as my savior and Lord around the age

of 12. I got my A.B. at Princeton University, studied theology at Westminster Seminary, earned two Masters' Degrees at Yale University. I married Mary Grace in 1984, served as stepdad to Debbie, Doreen, and Skip, and as bio-dad to Justin and Johnny. I taught theology at Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia, Westminster in California, and Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando.

T4L: Wow! That's quite a summary! I have quite a few questions for you—but seeing your education, I'm sure you'll give us some great insight. Firstly, can you briefly outline the work of Christ as King?

Dr. Frame: As God, Jesus shares the rule of the Father and the Holy Spirit over all things. As man, He receives the authority over all things that the Father has given Him, as we see in Matthew 28:18.

“He came to fulfill all the Law and the Prophets— this is explained in Matthew 5:17.”

T4L: Can you help us understand Christ as Prophet, please?

Dr. Frame: As God, Jesus IS the Word of God, the Word that all the prophets spoke, per John 1:1-14. As man, Jesus speaks all the truth the Father has given Him to speak. So He is the greatest of the prophets. He came to fulfill all the Law and the Prophets—this is explained in Matthew 5:17.

T4L: Excellent! And, can you please briefly describe Christ as Priest?

Dr. Frame: As God, Jesus is the one God who alone can be mediator between God and man, as expressed in 1st Timothy 2:5. As man, He lay down His life as a sacrifice for sinners, dying the death they deserved—we see this in Matthew 20:28.

T4L: Thank you for that wonderful explanation. Now I've got a more difficult question for you...What is *tri-perspectivalism*?

Dr. Frame: Often, when Scripture distinguishes parts or aspects of a doctrine, it does not separate them, but shows how they are inseparably united to one another—this is tri-perspectivalism. In the case of the three offices of Christ, Jesus could not have been king unless He had been prophet (uttering God's word of supreme power) and priest (who can mediate God's power to the created universe). He could not have been the supreme prophet unless His word had kingly power and the supreme priestly ability to reach our hearts. Nor could He have been the Greatest Priest unless He had the kingly power to break through man's sin and the truth that is a perfect reflection of the Father's intentions.

T4L: So, why does tri-perspectivalism matter for the Christian and those in Christian ministry, and how can it impact the Church as a whole?

Dr. Frame: It begins in the mysterious doctrine of the Trinity. In every phase of our experience, and in all of our salvation, God acts as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. There is a simplicity to it: He saves us completely from our sins and all their consequences. But in that simplicity, there is a wonderful richness, for we have fellowship with God in every way. In Him, we have a strong Father, a loving Son, and a Holy Spirit who dwells with us and in us. We have a relationship with God in all His fullness. So, in every moment He governs us as King, speaks to us as Prophet, and nurtures us as Priest.

T4L: Very insightful! Thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule to do this interview, Dr. Frame!

Dr. Frame: You're welcome!

Our Better Hope: Eight Priestly Comforts for Times of Need

By Christine M. Chappell

It was a heartbreaking sight. The wild turkey had dashed onto the road, frantically scurrying its skinny legs in a sprint for its life as a line of cars came barreling head-on. As I drove on a narrow, two-lane country road, I had enough distance to slow down and let the turkey pass. But the road was curved, and around the bend there was a lane of traffic which had no opportunity to slow at the sight of the crossing animal. As I held my breath in suspense, I noticed another pair of tiny legs trying to keep up with its mother's strides as she crossed the double-yellow. It was a turkey poult (or chick), and try as it might, the poor thing could not keep up



pace. While its mother had cleared the truck's path, the poult—for all its effort—did not. Once the mother had cleared the road, she stopped to look behind, searching for the baby that the truck tire had mowed. I covered my mouth in shock and immediately started to cry.

The baby had tried to keep up, but it was weak and feeble and small. It couldn't match the mother's speed or agility. It leapt and bounced on the pavement trying its best to survive in the face of danger, but alas, it could not.

In that moment of sadness, I sobbed and thanked Jesus for the promise of His presence in times of urgent need. While the poult could only hope in its own strength to survive, the gospel beckons us to remember our true and better hope—one not based upon our ability to save ourselves from danger, but one entirely incumbent upon Christ's work. Not only does He *go before us*, like a mother leading the way across a dangerous road, but He also *goes with us*, that we may be shielded from soul-threatening dangers that might otherwise extinguish our lives, as the truck did to the poult that mournful summer morning.

The Tender Heart of Our High Priest

It's no secret that trials tempt us to question God's character and promises. Sometimes we believe Jesus stands on the sidelines shouting directions at us without regard for the difficulty of the exercises. In our discouragement, we may reject the notion that God is walking with us and working all things into good through our tribulations. Yet, even when our hearts wrestle with doubts about God, Christ's heart knows no buyer's remorse. He is commissioned by God to be a mediator of pity, and deals gently with those who belong to His body.

In his work, *The Heart of Christ in Heaven towards Sinners on Earth*, Thomas Goodwin goes to tremendous lengths to demonstrate that the heart of Jesus Christ has not soured towards His people now that He is ascended to Heaven, but instead remains "*as tender in his affections*" as He ever was. Goodwin soothes, "[Christ] is willing to suffer, as it were, one

place to be left naked [in his heart], and to be flesh still, on which he may be wounded with your miseries, so that he might be your merciful high priest."

The duty of a priest in the Old Testament was to act as the people's representative in the presence of God, to offer sacrifices on their behalf for the forgiveness of sins. Ed Welch observes, *"The high priest actually wore symbols of the people on his vestments so the people were close [to God] by proxy"* when he entered into the temple to make atonement for sins.

In a better way, Jesus—the flesh of our own flesh—carries us to the throne of mercy where no mortal can enter. He bears the symbols of our desperation on His pierced hands. And as the true and better priest, the propitiation He made for our sins upon the cross was all-sufficient, all-encompassing, and all-satisfying: *"he did this once and for all when he offered up himself"* (Hebrews 7:27). Therefore, *"by the power of an indestructible life"* (Hebrews 7:16), Christ entered into *"heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf"* (Hebrews 9:24).

"The truth of Christ as our merciful High Priest may, upon first glance, appear as an irrelevant consolation in times of need..."

We do not need to wonder if Christ is our forerunner as well as our running mate. His status as great high priest makes Him both to us. He says, *"I am going away, and I will come to you"* (John 14:28). Welch continues, *"The Lord has descended to us and we have ascended with him. He has done this through the Spirit who unites us to Christ and brings us into the presence of God."*

The Assurance of Something Better

The truth of Christ as our merciful High Priest may, upon first

glance, appear as an irrelevant consolation in times of need, but the book of Hebrews highlights the critical importance of Jesus' role of the true and better priest of God's people. Not only has the Son of Man entered into the Father's presence as a forerunner on our behalf (Hebrews 6:20), but the book makes eight assurances of "better" things which directly result from Jesus's permanent high priestly duty.

1.) A better hope (7:19). Christ, as our high priest, offers believers a better hope—one not earned by merit or snuffed out by mortality, but one gifted by faith and eternally secured so we may be welcomed before the throne of mercy, escorted to God *presently* as well as *perpetually*.

2.) A better covenant (7:22). Jesus is the guarantor of a better covenant which knows no death or expiration date, but instead endures forever. As a result, the distraught believer may take comfort in knowing Christ is purposed and pleased to save, sustain, and make priestly intercession through prayer in all times, in all cases, for those who are covered by His blood.

3.) On better promises (8:6). The ministry Christ was given was to usher in better promises—ones that offer everlasting life, fellowship with God, and a divine inheritance. Thus, in our need, we lean onto these promises knowing that our light and momentary afflictions cannot compare to the coming glory that our great high priest secured for us (2nd Corinthians 4:17).

4.) With better sacrifices (9:23). Christ secured our eternal redemption by means of His own blood. Because His sacrifice was once and for all (Hebrews 7:27), we do not need to wonder if our tribulations stem from God's wrath. We can know Christ's better sacri-

fice secured *peace with God*, and therefore we can experience the *peace of God* in the midst of our trial.

5.) A better possession (10:34). Because of these former assurances secured by Christ, our high priest, we know the false hopes and securities the world has to offer will not withstand the day of grief and incurable pain (Isaiah 17:11). Courage builds as we loosen our grips on this world and set our minds to things above, knowing a better possession—a truer inheritance—is being kept for us in Heaven (1st Peter 1:4).

6.) A better country (11:16). Those whom our great high priest represents are on schedule to arrive in a better country—namely, a heavenly one. This hope does not keep us guessing about the future; ours is an everlasting triumph of resounding glory and joy in the presence of God Almighty. Whatever trial we face in this life cannot revoke the citizenship we hold in Heaven (Philippians 3:20).

7.) A better life (11:35). Of all the comforts our high priest mediates for us, the hope of a better life is the capstone for a weak and finite people, diseased by decay and cursed by sin. We groan most deeply for resurrection when we are weighed down by the various forms of death we experience in this world. A better life is an eternal life in the presence of our God, where sad things are exchanged for pleasures forevermore (Psalm 16:11).

8.) A better word (12:24). While the blood of Abel spoke bitter vengeance, the blood offered by Christ, our high priest, speaks a better word of reconciliation. This word assures us of an unshakable kingdom, not built by men, but by the peace of pardon found in Christ's salvation. It is through this better word we can say in times of need, "*I see troubles surrounding me, but Jesus is with me and interceding for me.*"

If I have peace before God through Christ Jesus, I have more than enough, indeed.”

The faithfulness of Christ, the High Priest, serves as the anchor of our hope in times of need. For all His priestly duties, Jesus does not tire to take pity upon us—He does not leave us to face danger head-on without His earnest care. He is our representative in Heaven—a great high priest who boasts in His lowliness (Matthew 11:29), and steps down to help us in our weakness. Charles Spurgeon writes that, in Christ, our anchor, *“is drawing us to itself, not downward beneath the devouring waves but upwards to ecstatic joys.”* May the upward pull of our Great High Priest in Heaven continue to encourage us when tribulation comes...

“May the upward pull of our Great High Priest in Heaven continue to encourage us when tribulation comes...”

upward pull of our Great High Priest in Heaven continue to encourage us when tribulation comes, that we might *“have the full assurance of hope until the end”* (Hebrews 6:11).

References:

Thomas Goodwin, *The Heart of Christ*, pg. 52
Ed Welch, “The Priority of the Priesthood for Human Identity”, *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* Volume 32, Number 2, pg. 13
Ibid., pg. 18
Ibid., pg. 18
Charles Spurgeon, *Finding Peace in the Life's Storms*, pg. 58

Could Christ Have Sinned?

A Defense of Christ's Sinless Perfection

By Stephen Wellum



A crucial theological question in Christology is: *could Jesus have sinned?*

This question is not easy to answer, and as such, it requires careful reflection, given the variety of issues involved.

Historically, classical Christology has

argued that our Lord Jesus Christ experienced temptation like us, yet He faced it as one who was unable to sin, hence the affirmation of the *impeccability* of Christ (*non posse peccare*). The minority report, on the other hand, is that Jesus experienced temptation and that, although He

never sinned, He was able to do so—hence the assertion of Christ’s *peccability* (*osse non peccare*).

Both viewpoints admit that, in wrestling with the question, one must do justice to the following biblical truths: (1) Jesus never actually sinned. Scripture is clear on this point, so the issue is whether Jesus *could have* sinned, not whether He actually did. (2) Jesus was tempted, and His temptations were genuine (Luke 4:2; Hebrews 4:15; 5:5-7). In fact, Kevin Vanhoozer astutely notes how the Gospels begin and end with the temptation of Christ. “*The temptation narrative at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry (Luke 4:1-13) is a showcase for the same active suffering that marks another temptation narrative (Luke 22:39-46), together with the passion narrative, at its end.*” One must affirm, then, the genuineness of Jesus’s temptations: as the obedient Son, from the beginning of His ministry to the cross, He faced trials, temptations, and sufferings for us. Any view that minimizes the reality of His temptations is inconsistent with Scripture.

Yet, we must add a caveat: we must strongly affirm the reality of Christ’s temptations, but we must not make His temptations the same as ours *in every respect*. Why? Because, as much as Jesus is like us, He is also utterly unique, and His temptations reflect this fact. For example, Jesus was tempted to turn rocks into bread, a temptation that normal humans do not face. He was tempted to use His divine prerogatives instead of walking the path of obedience, and He chose to live in dependence upon the Father in order to become our merciful and faithful High Priest (Hebrews 2:17-18).

In addition, He faced temptation in Gethsemane, but not by anything within Himself, since He was perfectly holy and righteous. Unlike us in our fallen condition, in Christ there was no predisposition to sin and no love of it. The temptation He faced was unique to Him *as the Son*, and it was unique to Him as our sin-bearer. He rightly and legitimately recoiled at the prospect of losing His communion with His Father for a time; as a man, He rightly wanted to avoid death in this way for many

reasons. We must never deny that Christ's temptations were real, indeed more real than we could ever imagine or experience, but we must also affirm that they were utterly unique to Him. (3) God cannot be tempted with evil, and God cannot sin (James 1:13).

From within these three biblical truths, the question regarding Christ's impeccability or peccability must be answered. If the second

point is upheld, it would seem that the Son, by becoming a man, would be able to sin. After all, as the peccability argument goes, if Jesus could not have sinned, then how is He truly like us? Yet, given that the *person* of the incarnation is the divine Son, would not point number 3 apply to Him, and thus render Him unable to sin? Ultimately, the challenge is to uphold all three truths simultaneously without minimizing any of them. How shall we do so?

Not Able to Sin

Our answer is that the impeccability position is best. Why? Let us first state the theological rationale for it, working within the parameters of classical Christology, and then offer a brief defense of it. Theologically speaking, if we view our Lord as merely the man Christ Jesus, even though his human nature was unfallen and sinless, He would nevertheless, like the first Adam, be *able to sin*. In this sense, we can say that Jesus's unfallen human nature was *peccable*.

But there is more to the identity of Jesus than this, especially when we think of the "*who*" of the incarnation. Jesus is not merely another Adam or even a greater, Spirit-empowered one. He is the last Adam, the head of the new creation, the divine Son incarnate; and *as the Son*, it is impossible for *Him* to sin and to yield to temptation, because God cannot sin. Behind this assertion is the fact that sin is an act of the *person*, not of the nature, and that in the case of Christ, *He* is the eter-

nal Son. As Macleod reminds us, *“If he sinned, God sinned. At this level, the impeccability of Christ is absolute. It rests not upon his unique endowment with the Spirit nor upon the indefectibility of God’s redemptive purpose, but upon the fact that he is who he is.”*

Ultimately, the explanation for why Jesus could not have sinned, similar to the explanation for when and how He acts and knows, is Trinitarian. What made it impossible for Him to sin was not His divine nature as an acting agent, but the fact that He is the Son, in relation to the Father and Spirit, and as the Son, He speaks, acts, and chooses—gladly and willingly—to obey His Father in all things. Herman Bavinck captures this rationale well: *“He is the Son of God, the Logos, who was in the beginning with God and himself God. He is one with the Father and always carries out his Father’s will and work. For those who confess this of Christ, the possibility of him sinning and falling is unthinkable.”*

In fact, it is this truth that provides the grounding and assurance of the indefectibility of God’s sovereign plan, and ultimately explains why, in Christ, all of God’s gracious purposes cannot fail. It is also the reason why the last Adam is far greater than the first; and thankfully, why the redemption He secures is gloriously better in every way imaginable.

References:

1. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology: Divine Action, Passion, and Authorship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 430.
2. Donald Macleod, *The Person of Christ*, *Contours of Christian Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 229–230. Macleod goes on to say, “We may link the subject ‘God’ with many predicates. The Son of God may suffer, may be tempted, may be ignorant and may even die. But we cannot link God with the predicate ‘sin.’ God cannot in any situation or for any purpose commit a transgression of his own will. He absolutely cannot be guilty of lawlessness” (230).
3. Herman Bavinck, *Sin and Salvation in Christ*, vol. 3 of *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 314.

The Unfolding of the Gospel in Hebrews

By Robert Peterson

The book of Hebrews unfolds the gospel in at least five ways:

it shows the connection between Christ's person and His work, shows His superiority to Old Testament persons and institu-



tions, underscores humanity's need for redemption, warns of apostasy, and exhorts professed believers to persevere.

First, Hebrews remarkably combines the person and work of Christ. Chapter 1 teaches the deity of Christ as powerfully as any place in Scripture. Chapter 2 highlights Christ's humanity. Chapters 7–9 constitute the most extensive teaching on Christ's priesthood and atoning sacrifice. What is the point? The person of Christ, as God and man, con-

stitutes the basis for His saving work. His identity undergirds His performing the unique saving deeds of dying for sinners and rising from the dead. Because He is God, He is able to save us, for only God can save. Because He became a man of flesh and blood, He is able to save us, for one of our human race died in our place and overcame death and the Devil in His resurrection.

“...Hebrews underscores humanity’s need for redemption.”

Second, Hebrews shows Christ’s superiority to Old Testament persons and institutions. He is the great and final Prophet, far surpassing Old Testament mediators of revelation—prophets and angels (Hebrews 1). Therefore, the gospel that He brought is even more important than the law that was given to Moses through angels (Acts 7:53; Hebrews 2:1-4; Galatians 3:19). Christ is superior to Moses, Aaron, and all Israel’s subsequent high priests (Hebrews 3:6; 5; 7). This is because Jesus is a priest according to the order of Melchizedek who, unlike the sons of Aaron, lives forever and thus has a perpetual priesthood. He is the Great High Priest who presents Himself as the final offering, bringing the end to sacrifice and saving to the uttermost those who come to God through Him (Hebrews 9-10).

Need for Christ

Third, Hebrews underscores humanity’s need for redemption. As children of Adam we are fallen, and we do not exercise proper dominion over creation (Hebrews 2:8). We are held in bondage by the fear of death and by him who had the power of death—the Devil (Hebrews 2:14-15). Left to ourselves, like Israel of old, our hearts are unbelieving and rebellious (Hebrews 3-4). We are unclean and need Christ’s purifying blood through His violent death, to be cleansed to serve the living God (Hebrews 9:14, 23; 10:22). Even as believers we are prone to wander from our first love and thus, we need God’s warnings, exhortations, and grace to persevere. In a word, we are needy sinners in need of a gracious

and mighty Savior. And that is just what God has provided in His incarnate Son, Jesus Christ.

Fourth, as strongly as any place in the Bible, Hebrews warns of the danger of apostasy—in five passages: Hebrews 2:1-4; 3:7-4:13; 5:11-16; 10:19-39; 12:1-29. Plainly, the original readers of Hebrews were in danger of turning from the faith they had formerly professed. However, Hebrews also asserts that God not only saves His people from their sins, but also keeps them saved to the end (Hebrews 6:13-20; 7:23-25). And one of the means that God employs to keep us is to warn of the folly of deserting Him who saves us freely by His grace. There is nowhere else to turn.

Steady On

Fifth, Hebrews exhorts professed believers to persevere (Hebrews 2:1; 4:14; 6:1-3; 10:23, 36; 12:1-2). It is true that God saves us once and for all. But that salvation is not static, but rather dynamic. It is as dynamic as the living relationship between God and His people (made formal in the new covenant; Hebrews 8). The covenant is God's pledge to be God to us and to make us His own. Because He loves us, He not only assures us of His love with both promise and oath, but also exhorts us to keep on living obediently in the faith, to keep on gathering with other believers for worship, and not to harden our hearts against Him in rebellion.

While Hebrews clearly makes its own unique contribution, it joins other New Testament books in exulting in the same amazing grace in Jesus that forms the Bible's main message. **The message of Hebrews is, at its core, the gospel: the good news of redemption for sinners.**

Jesus, Our Great Intercessor

By Ben Wilson



There are many wonderful works Jesus did for His people.

Jesus said that He came in His incarnation “[not] to be served but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark

10:45). Jesus gave Himself for His people. He lived the life we could not live, and He died the death that should have been ours, He paid the penalty we deserved. We praise Jesus for His atoning life, death, and resurrection. And we should. That is the proper response.

But I wonder, when was that last time you (I’m looking at me, too) sang a song of praise to Jesus for His work of intercession? Better yet,

when was the last time that you thought about the glorious truth and reality that Jesus prays for you? This is a neglected truth about an important work of Christ on behalf of His people. Jesus prays for us; He intercedes for us.

The Atonement and Intercession

The atonement of Christ is the foundation of His intercessory work. Two passages that show us the connection between the atonement and Christ's intercession are Romans 8:32-34 and 1st John 2:1-2.

First, let's give attention to Romans 8:32-34:

"He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us."

This passage, Romans 8:31-39, is meant to convince the believer that they will never be separated from the love of God in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:39). There is a logical progression here. God will graciously give us all things because He did not spare His own Son, but gave Him

"What is Jesus doing at the right hand of God?"

up for us all.

No one can bring a charge of condemnation against us because Christ is the one who justifies the people of God. Paul already stated this at the beginning of the chapter, *"there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus"* (Romans 8:1). Why can

no one effectively bring a charge of condemnation against us? Paul's reasoning in verse 34 is because Christ Jesus is the one who died, He is the one who was raised from the dead, and He is at the right hand of God.

What is Jesus doing at the right hand of God? He is interceding for us. There is a clear connection for Paul between the different aspects of

the work of Christ. It is not that the atonement is a separate work from Christ's intercession, but they all work together. You cannot separate them. If Jesus had not died, rose again, and ascended to the right hand of God He would not be interceding for us.

We see the same logic from the Apostle John in 1st John 2:1-2:

“My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.”

John writes to these believers so that they might not sin. Sin is abnormal for the Christian. We fight against it and we do not want to do it. But we all know the painful reality is that we do still sin. Because we do sin, we need an advocate before the Father—and we have one. But, not just any ordinary advocate, we have Jesus Christ, the Righteous One, as our advocate. When we sin, Jesus, as our Advocate, pleads the merits of His own blood before the Father and forgives us through His righteousness (1st John 1:9). While considering these truths, we also need to understand, as we considered with Romans 8:31-39, our standing with God remains. What we are referring to here relates to our fellowship—or communion—with Christ, not our standing with Christ.

John echoes Paul by connecting Jesus' work of atonement with His work of advocacy or intercession. In verse 2, Jesus Christ, the Righteous One, is called the propitiation for our sins. Jesus bore the wrath of God on our behalf so that we might be made right with God. If Jesus had not borne the wrath we deserved and paid the penalty we should have paid for breaking God's law, then His intercession would be ineffective.

This is an important reminder for us to not separate the various facets of the work of Christ. Each activity that comprises the work of Christ, active and passive obedience, death, resurrection, are all part of one great work that we call the work of Christ. We should stand in awe of what Christ has done, and does, on behalf of His people.

A question remains, though. If the atonement of Christ is complete

and perfect, if He offered Himself once for all (Hebrews 9:26), why do we need the intercession of Christ?

Why Do We Need Christ's Intercession?

Before we answer this question, we need to answer another one. What does it mean that Christ intercedes for His people? Jesus is our Great High Priest, who always lives to make intercession for His people (Hebrews 7:25).

John Owen defines it this way: *"His continual appearance for us in the presence of God, by virtue of his office as the 'high priest over the house of God,' representing the efficacy of his oblation, accompanied with tender care, love, and desires for the welfare, supply, deliverance, and salvation of the church"* (Exposition of Hebrews, vol. 5, p. 541).

In short, Jesus prays for those who are His own—His disciples—in the presence of God. A beautiful display of Jesus praying for His disciples is John 17. Twice Jesus says He is not praying for the world in general, but is praying for those who belong to Him (John 17:9, 20). In short then, Jesus prays for His people on their behalf, that is His work of intercession.

The answer to why we need Christ's intercession is seen in the content of Jesus' prayers. There are many different things Jesus prays for, but we will focus on two. Jesus intercedes for His people for their sanctification and their perseverance.

The Intercession of Christ and Sanctification

Firstly, what is our sanctification? Sanctification can only happen in a context where we know God. Jesus prays that the Father would glorify Him in John 17, and part of this glorification is Jesus' ability to give eternal life to whom He will (John 17:2). Eternal life is knowing God and Jesus Christ, who was sent by the Father (John 17:3). We must know God *in order to be sanctified*. Jesus' prayer to be glorified has been answered so we can be confident in His prayer for our sanctification.

In John 17:17 Jesus requests that the Father would sanctify His people. How will this sanctification happen? It will happen through the Spirit working through Scripture (John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13).

The Apostle John was clearly affected by this prayer as we saw in 1st John 2:1. We need an advocate with the Father because our flesh fights against the convicting work that the Holy Spirit does in our lives to make us more like Jesus. In God's wisdom He has worked our sanctification in such a way that we need Christ's intercessory work for it to happen.

The Intercession of Christ and Perseverance

The second reason we need Jesus' intercession is for our perseverance. We, God's children, have three enemies that will do anything they

"Because our enemies have a common goal—stealing, killing, and destroying our souls—we need all the help we can get."

can to keep us from persevering to the end.

The world, the system of evil setup against

God and His will, would love nothing more

than to see us fail. The world is passing

away as well as its desires (1st John 2:17).

While it is on its way out, it wants to trip up the saints and keep them from crossing the finish line.

The second enemy is our own flesh. This is why Paul encourages the Galatians to not walk in the desires of the flesh (Galatians 5:16). We have experienced the battle. We know what to do to walk in holiness, but we don't do it (Romans 7:14-25). We are new creations in Christ, but we still live in this fleshly body that wants us to go the way of the world.

Our final enemy is also a defeated one, but is still fighting hard against us: Satan. He roams around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour (1st Peter 5:8). Satan and his demonic forces want to destroy the church and they will do everything they can to make it happen.

Because our enemies have a common goal—stealing, killing, and destroying our souls—we need all the help we can get. God, in His grace,

does not leave us alone. He sends His Spirit to help us, and Jesus is praying for us that we might persevere. Jesus prays for this explicitly in John 17:24, *“Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.”* Jesus desires that His disciples would be with Him so that they might see the glory He possessed before the foundation of the world. Jesus wants us to persevere until the end, and He prays that it would happen.

Romans 8:31-39 displays this by inference. Jesus is at the right hand of the Father, interceding for His own. Paul teaches that nothing will separate God’s children from His love in Christ Jesus. We can assume from this that part of Jesus’ intercession is that we would persevere, so we would not be separated from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

We can take comfort in Jesus’ work of intercession. He always prays according to the will of God; He prays for our sanctification and our perseverance. We can live confidently in this world with all its trouble (John 16:33) because Jesus has accomplished much for us, and is interceding for us. He is our Great Intercessor.

Christ as Prophet, Priest, and King

By James Williams



The Old Testament is filled with stories of men and women that God used in powerful ways. Who can forget the miraculous way God raised up the prophet Moses and used him to deliver the people from Egyptian bondage? Who can forget the great victories God brought about through King David and his armies?

Yet, as great a prophet as Moses was, God promised to raise up another like him (Deuteronomy 18:15) who would actually be greater (Hebrews 3:1-6). As great of a king as David was, God promised to send a king from David's line who will reign forever (2nd Samuel 7:12-13). As hard as it would be to imagine a prophet like that or a king that significant, it's even harder to imagine these promises would be filled in the same person. This promised royal prophet would also be a great high priest (Hebrews 4:14-5:10) whose sacrifice would render the entire Old Testament sacrificial system obsolete (Hebrews 10:1-18).

“Because of the curse of sin,
our hearts are blind...”

Scripture teaches that the promises of such a great prophet, priest, and king are all fulfilled in the person and work of Christ. Using *Great Doctrines of the Bible*, by Martyn Lloyd-Jones, as our guide, we'll examine each of these roles of Christ.

Christ the Prophet

Because of the curse of sin, our hearts are blind (Ephesians 4:17-18) and we are walking in darkness. We need a prophet who can deliver us from our own ignorance of sin. In the Old Testament, a prophet was a messenger of God sent to deliver a word from God. We often think of a prophet as one who tells of something in the future; while that is certainly true, that's not *all* a prophet did. The message of a prophet also involved warning people of their sin and reminding them of God's promises. God's people often rejected such warnings (Matthew 5:11-12), but these prophets were nevertheless from God (292-293).

God's chosen people were awaiting such a prophet (John 6:14). Peter argues that this promised prophet is Christ (Acts 3:19-26). Our Lord Jesus Himself claimed to be such a prophet (Luke 13:33), who spoke the words of God (John 14:10; 12:49-50; Matthew 7:29). Not only did He claim to be a prophet, but He fulfilled His prophetic role *"in all His teaching: His teaching concerning God, the Father; His exposition of the law in*

the Sermon on the Mount; in all He told us of God's love, of God's gracious purpose, of His nature and His person. All this was a part of the exercise of His prophetic function, and, supremely, He told us about Himself. All this is vital, and I emphasize it because we sometimes forget that a part of our salvation consists in our receiving this knowledge that our Lord has given" (295).

Jesus is the prophet promised in Deuteronomy 18 who declares the truth about our sin and proclaims the good news of hope and salvation!

Christ the Priest

Our sin renders us unable to stand before a holy God. We need to be delivered from our guilt, and in the Old Testament the High Priest would make such an offering for sin. A priest would stand before God on behalf of man: *"The prophet is one who came with a message from God to man; the priest is one who goes from man to God..." (297).*

However, the sacrifice rendered by human priests was insufficient. Hebrews 5:1-5 teaches that one of the roles of the Lord Jesus was to fulfill this role as priest on behalf of man. Lloyd-Jones summarizes four points about the nature and function of the priesthood from Hebrews 5 (299):

1. He must be a human to represent humanity (v. 1).
2. He is chosen and appointed by God (v. 4).
3. He is *"active in the interests of men in things pertaining to God"* (v. 1).
4. He offers gifts and sacrifices for sins (v. 1).

Furthermore, Scriptures teaches that priests should be holy:

"They shall be holy to their God and not profane the name of their God. For they offer the Lord's food offerings, the bread of their God; therefore they shall be holy" (Leviticus 21:6).

Based on these functions, MLJ defines the priest as *"essentially a mediator who does two main things. First, he propitiates by sacrifices; second, he intercedes on behalf of the people"* (300).

The priest secures reconciliation between God and man through

propitiation (satisfaction offered to a holy, offended God) by means of a substitute (someone who's innocent suffering on behalf of the guilty) to provide atonement.

Thankfully, Jesus has fulfilled all of these priestly functions (Hebrews 3:1; 4:14; 5:5; 6:20; 7:26; 8:1). Without such a mediator, we could not have access to a holy God. Without such a sacrifice, we could not be cleansed. Christ has come so we have an Advocate who endlessly intercedes on our behalf. Lloyd-Jones concludes:

“Having Himself experienced the infirmities, though still without sin, having been tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin, He is the High Priest who can represent us and speak on our behalf. And we have seen that He has an offering to offer, a sacrifice to present that has been accepted of God. So He intercede and ever lives to make intercession for all who come to God by Him” (305).

Christ the King

Christ is not only the promised prophet and priest, but He's also the promised King. God promises David that one of his sons would build a "house" that would never be destroyed (Psalms 132:13-14; 2nd Samuel 7:13; 1st Peter 2:2-5). This King would reign forever (2nd Samuel 7:13)!

Israel continued to wait for the promised king, however each king showed their shortcomings and failures. Even a good king like David displayed his faults. This is a continued theme in the books of Kings (2nd Kings 13:11, 21:2). However, God had determined that He was going to ensure this promise comes to pass. Centuries later, an angel would appear to a young woman announcing her pregnancy:

And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end (Luke 1:31-33).

Christ is the promised King who reigns over His kingdom forever-

more. Lloyd-Jones defines the kingdom as *"His reign, His rule. Wherever the rule of Christ is acknowledge and delighted in, there is Christ's kingdom, and there is Christ the King"* (369). While we are not worthy to be citizens of such a great kingdom, Christ has made it available through His priestly sacrifice.

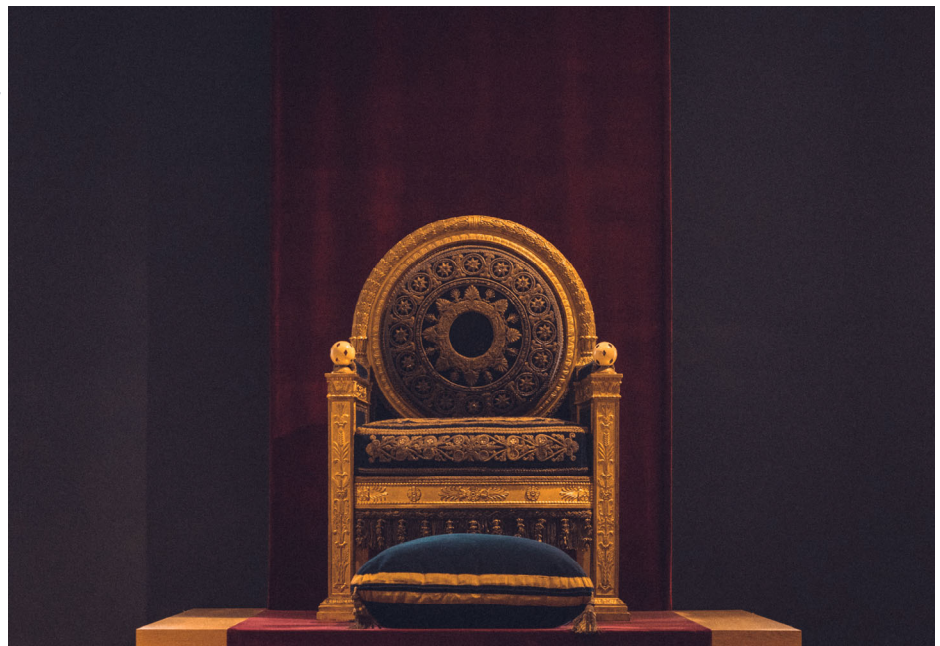
Final Thoughts

Christ has declared to us the truth about our situation and the only hope mankind has (Prophet). He has provided a sufficient sacrifice that is pleasing to God and atones for the sin of man (Priest). Thus, those who repent and believe the gospel will be transferred from the kingdom of darkness into God's eternal kingdom and live under His reign forever (King). Praise God that Christ is the perfect Prophet, Priest, and King!

Our Righteous Advocate

By Dave Jenkins

“My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.” (1st John 2:1-2)



The ascension of Christ in Question 46 of the Heidelberg Catechism prompts the discussion on the hypostatic union in questions and answers 47-48. In question and answer 49 of the Heidelberg Catechism, the ascension of Jesus is *again* mentioned, outlining the benefits of the ascension of Christ to Heaven after the resurrection. In turning to 1st John 2:1, the Heidelberg Catechism teaches that the ascension of Christ establishes Him as the Advocate of the people of God. In

the ancient world, it is an advocate—much the same as a modern defense attorney—who pleads a defendant's case before a Judge. When the Apostle John calls Jesus an "Advocate", he means that our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, stands before the Father to plead on behalf of His redeemed people.

Jesus' Work as Advocate and the Christian

The work of Jesus as Advocate goes beyond the defense of an earthly lawyer. Jesus' case is grounded in His finished and sufficient work, which secures God's verdict of *not guilty* for God's people (Romans 8:1-4). Those who are forgiven are now in Christ. God is no longer the Judge who condemns His people, but the One who adopts them into His family. While we are guilty of sin and unable to meet the perfect, holy, and just demands of the Lord, the perfect righteousness of Jesus, imputed to God's people in justification, sets them right with God. Matthew Henry explains, *"The clients are guilty; their innocence and legal righteousness cannot be pleaded. It is the advocate's own righteousness that he must plead for the criminals."*

The Lord no longer condemns Christians since Christ has forever satisfied the Father's just demands. 1st John 2:2 describes the foundation for Jesus' work as our Advocate. Therein it states that He is the "*propitiation*" for the people of God, the one who endured the full, white-hot fury of the wrath of God, that you and I deserve, so that divine justice would be fulfilled. Christ is the propitiation for "the whole world", in the sense that Jesus redeemed not only Jews, but all people from every tribe, tongue, and people of every nation. To further expand on this point, the Father accepts no atonement from anyone except that from God the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. And this is why Jesus is the world's only hope, the only Savior, and the only way to be saved.

Jesus' Work as Advocate and Sanctification

1st John 2:1 explains Jesus' priestly work as Advocate involves the ongoing sanctification of the people of God, as well as their once-for-all

justification. Christians, from the first moment in time when they trust Jesus, have the righteousness of God imputed to them, giving them a righteous standing before God—one that cannot be lost (Romans 5:9; 8:30). While there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ, we have not yet reached glorification. Therefore, we continue to sin until the day we die and are then clothed in white—completely and utterly like our Lord. And that means, while here on earth, that Christians continually need the forgiveness He provides to help them daily walk in holiness before the face of God. And as we repent of sin, Jesus advocates for His people before the Father, to restore our fellowship with God.

Jesus Right Now is Pleading Before the Father

At this moment, as you reading this article, Jesus is—right now—pleading with the Father on behalf of His people; interceding for them that they might be forgiven, purified, and strengthened in holiness.

“As His followers, we will still sin.”

While every Christian must work out his/her salvation in fear and trembling (Philippians 2:12-13) and strive for holiness, by the grace of God through the Holy Spirit, we can only do so because of Jesus. Jesus prays for the people of God, which guarantees that they will persevere. Of all the truths we could consider, even briefly, that last sentence should cause

us to draw near to the throne of God, in worship of the Lord Jesus, who forgives our sin. Jesus alone gives us a new standing before God the Father, and calls us now to carry forth the glad tidings of good news in His name, for His glory.

Adoption and Jesus’ Work as Advocate

Jesus is our Advocate when God first accepts us into His family as His children (John 1:12). And He remains our Advocate forever. 1st John 1:9 says that, when we confess our sin, He is faithful and just to forgive our sin and to cleanse us from it. As His followers, we will still sin. But, when we do, we are commanded to confess that sin to God. Confession is

an agreement with God about how bad sin is. We stand guilty before Him, with no argument and no justification of our own. Our Advocate steps before the Judge, and together they agree that, because we are “in Christ”, no further punishment is necessary. Jesus has already made sufficient payment to redeem us.

“Our heavenly Advocate knows our hearts and pleads our case on the basis of what is there...”

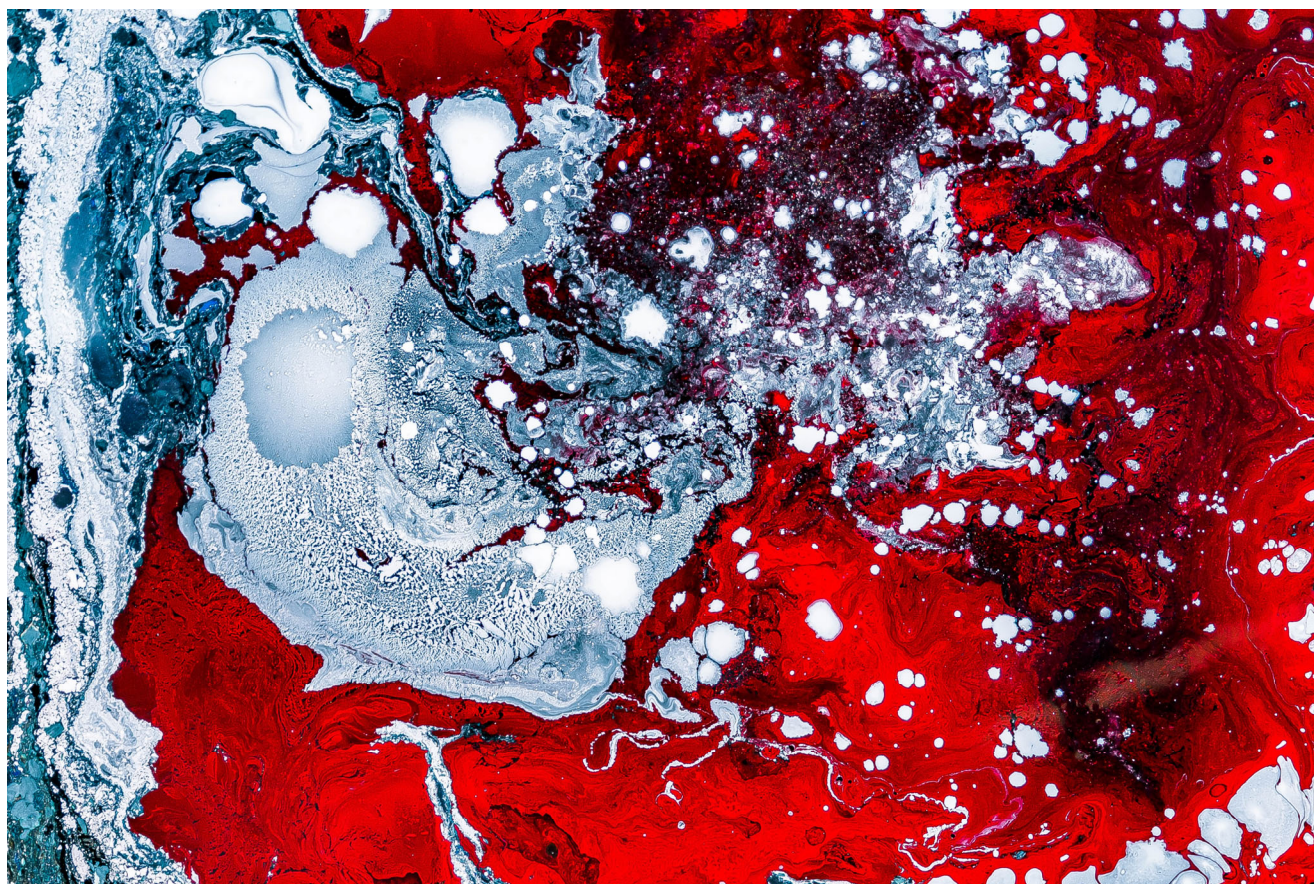
Jesus is a Compassionate Advocate

Another aspect that makes Jesus a compassionate Advocate is the fact that He has experienced life in this world, too. He has been tempted, rejected, overlooked, misunderstood, and abused. He does not represent us theoretically; He represents us experientially. He lived the life we live, yet He did so without succumbing to the evils that assail us. He successfully refused to give in to temptation and can be our High Priest because He perfectly fulfilled God’s law (John 8:29; Hebrews 4:15; 9:28). Our Advocate can plead our case from personal experience.

An earthly advocate can only plead our case from external evidence or witness testimony. Our heavenly Advocate knows our hearts and pleads our case on the basis of what is there (Mark 2:8; Luke 5:22). He also knows the intricacies of God’s legal system. He has already satisfied the demands of justice, so His advocacy is from a position of strength and righteousness. God accepts His Son’s advocacy on our behalf as part of their divine agreement, established before the world began (John 17:24; 1st Peter 1:20; Revelation 13:8). Our position as “the righteousness of Christ” is secure because the One who purchased our position with His own blood is also our Advocate (Romans 4:25; 8:3; 1st Corinthians 1:30).

The Blood of Jesus

By Dave Jenkins



The cleaning of humanity by the blood of Jesus is the turning point of human history. This is what Hebrews 9:26 means when it says that Christ “*appeared once for all at the end of the ages.*” That expression marks this as the decisive point of

history, when God's redemptive plan comes into full focus as the climax of all history. Before Christ went into Heaven, having died on the cross and been raised from the dead, there was no way for sinners to have fellowship with the Holy God. That is what the Old Testament Israel was all about, but when the great High Priest entered into Heaven with His own saving blood, everything changed forever for those who come to God through Him. His appearing there for His people is the definitive act of history so far as the salvation of sinners is concerned.

A Right View of History Centered on Christ

A right view of history is vital to the writer of Hebrews, and to make things perfectly clear, he relates the history of God's redemptive work to the personal history of every person born on earth: *"And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him"* (Hebrews 9:27-28). There is a relationship between the personal history of every individual and God's redemptive history that centers on the death of Christ. Indeed, the latter is fitted to the needs of the former, and therefore they are similarly arranged.

Hebrews 9:27 and Life after Death

The point in Hebrews 9:27 makes is an important one. People want to know, or at least they *should* want to know, what happens after they die. The general view of the ancient Greeks was that they are disintegrated into nothing, or absorbed into a great impersonal cosmic sea. At best their hope was a vague "if". As the Roman historian, Tacitus, wrote in eulogy of a man he admired, *"If there be any habitation for the spirits of just men, if great souls perish not with the body mayest though rest in peace."* Marcus Aurelius, the philosopher-empower of Rome, could think of only a spark from man's soul returning to be lost forever in God.^[1] People who look to the Eastern tradition of reincarnation have a hope that is hardly better. They think of souls returning to the earth for near-endless toil in one life after another, until finally they

merit the reward of oblivion.

The Christian answer to this question could not be more different. The answer to this question is in Hebrews 9:27: *“And just as it is ap-*

“Jesus made the provision for the forgiveness His people need.”

pointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment.” There is *this life* and death, and no others, after which comes judgment before God’s holy throne. There is a resurrection for both the just and the unjust. All will die, and after death one must come to stand before God to be measured according to the

perfect standard of God’s holy law.

This rules out the many “second-chance” theories that are occasionally popular in Christian circles. People like to think that even if they deny Christ in this life, and then die in their sins, that they can have another chance (to plead their case) when they die and see Him face to face. Hebrews 9:27 flies in the face of this teaching, and explains that after death is judgment. Jesus warned in John 8:24, *“I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins.”* Indeed, the great gospel verses in John 3 make it plain that those who refuse Jesus Christ will perish. *“Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God”* (John 3:18).

Jesus the Provision for Eternal Life People Need

Jesus made the provision for the forgiveness His people need. He has died in the place of sinners on the cross, taking up their sins, and then appeared before God in Heaven with the marks still on His hands and feet, His blood bearing testimony to His redeeming work for all who search and come to Him in faith.

The shedding of Christ’s blood and His appearance in Heaven as Redeemer of His own is a once-for-all event that changes everything. Since Christ died to remove His people’s sin, this need happen only once. His blood is sufficient for the task, so there is no need for repetition. Not

only does this *need* to happen only once, but it *can* only happen once. This has profound impact on every Christian's life.

It is sadly, a very common experience today for Christians to supposedly experience conversion over and over—some Christians are even baptized repeatedly. The reason this happens is that they feel an ongoing need to deal with the guilt of their sin. They come to Christ—perhaps at a revival meeting, which emphasized the importance of a personal decision—answering a call to come to the altar. There they gave their hearts to Jesus, pledging faith to Him and enmity to sin. The emphasis was on their actions, their decision. In the evening, as they lay their heads down to sleep, there is a joy and a peace they had never known before—the joy of the redeemed and the peace of the forgiven.

In the morning, however, they awoke in the world and not in Heaven. How much easier it would be were that not so! They awoke still as sinners, perhaps to their great alarm. Though truly saved, and though God had given them the new birth, they found they still sinned. Yes, often the Lord gives grace for an immediate deliverance from particular

“The weak believer discovers the continuing reality of sin, to his alarm.”

sins, and this is a great encouragement to the new believer, but total deliverance from all of sin's power—total escape from our sinful nature—comes only after death, and not at conversion. This is why the book of Hebrews so strongly warns believers to avoid the snares of sin (Hebrews 3:13; 12:1)

—were sin no longer a problem, such warnings would not have been needed.

The weak believer discovers the continuing reality of sin, to his alarm. With clawing fear, he contemplates a judgment he now is more keenly aware of than ever before. Over and over again he seeks forgiveness out of resources of his own capacity to believe and repent, a capacity that is limited and insufficient to the task. Whole lives are present like this: seeking a conversion that will finally stick, seeking an experi-

ence that will do the job, seeking a passion that will cleanse them once-for-all.

If Christians are saved by their faith, then it would not be “once-for-all”, because faith is not reliable or permanent. Christians are often prone to wander, sometimes being weak and sometimes strong. “Once-for-all” is not an expression used in reference to their faith and repentance, because Christians have not sinned for the last time, or experienced their last doubt, or shed their last tear for sin or failure.

The Good News of the Gospel is Christ Himself

The good news of the Gospel is that Christians are not saved by their “faith”, but by *Christ Himself*. This means that His death saves His people, and this was “once-for-all”. His entry into Heaven to minister to His people saves them; it upholds those with weak and wavering faith, once-for-all. This proves the point that what is not once-for-all for Christians is once-for-all for *Him*. The peace of Christ is not in believers, it is in Christ. Christians must receive Christ by faith, but the point is that the faith they exercise is not the foundation upon which salvation relies, since salvation relies upon Jesus, of whose sacrifice and redemption it can be said, “once-for-all”.

Believers’ works will never give them peace, hope, or joy. The Scripture says that God has “no variation or shadow due to change” (James 1:17), but this is not a reference to Christians. “Once-for-all”, the Lord Jesus Christ appeared before God, and there He remains, bearing the marks of His once-for-all sacrifice.

Understanding this point makes it clear that the forgiveness Christ procured on the Cross is once-for-all, which means God’s love towards His people is sure forever. Christ does not have to die over and over—does not have to bring His blood back and forth to God—because “*he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself*” (Hebrews 9:26). Therefore, Christians need not seek forgiveness over and over, but may rest their hearts in Christ (and then get busy serving His cause in the world). In the death of Christ and in His

ascension into Heaven, something definitive happened. It is a definitive work with a definite result: “to bear the sins of many” (Hebrews 9:28).

Hebrews 9:28 and the Means and End of All History

Hebrews 9:28 contains a statement of means and ends for all of history. The means is the appearance of Jesus Christ as the decisive intervention that changes all things. This was the importance of His first coming: Christ was sacrificed to appear for His people in God’s presence. That twofold work—Christ’s death for our forgiveness and Christ’s life for our salvation—is the focus of redemptive history. Paul writes in Romans 6:10, *“For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God.”*

“Christ died definitively, and He lives definitively, securing the salvation by His eternal testimony to His once-for-all work of redemption.”

Christ died definitively, and He lives definitively, securing the salvation by His eternal testimony to His once-for-all work of redemption. Together, His death and His eternal life in Heaven are the means of the salvation of the people of God. *“For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf”* (Hebrews 9:24).

Hebrews 9:26 then expresses the end toward which all is directed: *“for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.”*

Hebrews 9:28 repeats it: “to bear the sins of many”. Christ has taken away sins of His people; His work was directed to that end, and it is done once-for-all. This was the designed intention of the saving work of Christ, all of which is now declared in this tense. He was sacrificed, and He entered heaven to appear for His people. It is a definitive work—

accomplished, secured, and finished. Yes, Christians still have to contend with sin—it is defeated, but not removed. Therefore, Christians await Christ’s return to save them from this struggle. But, while Christians wait, they are secure forever in Him. This is why Christians can sing about this struggle with such confidence and hope:

*When darkness veils His lovely face,
I rest on His unchanging grace;
In every high and stormy gale,
My anchor holds within the devil.
On Christ, the solid rock, I stand;
All other ground is sinking sand.* [\[2\]](#)

That leads to the second point: namely, that although Christ’s death and appearance in Heaven for His people is the turning point of history, it is not the end of history. “*So Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him*” (Hebrews 9:28).

History had a beginning in the creation of all things. History has a problem—namely, man’s fall into sin and condemnation. It also has a focal turning point that answers every need: the first coming of Christ, with His death, resurrection, and ascension into Heaven as Savior of sinners. History has its culmination: the return of Christ, not in weakness but in glory; “*not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him*” (Hebrews 9:28). What a great hope this provides to all who believe, but struggle in this world. The great Puritan, John Owen, writes:

“Faith in the second of Christ is sufficient to support the souls of believers, and to give them satisfactory consolation in all difficulties, trials, and distresses. All true believers live in a waiting, longing expectation of the coming of Christ. It is one of the most distinguishing

characteristics of believers so to do. At the second appearance of Christ there will be an end of the business about sin, both on his part and ours.”[\[3\]](#)

Judgment is inevitable, but sin is not. Believers will not have to put up with sin forever. It is not simply the way things are or always will be. It has been dealt with, and even as Christians war against it still, they know the victor’s crown lies not far ahead. Christians are waiting for Him, and while they wait, they are to serve Him and worship Him with all their lives; bearing witness to a lost and guilty world. This is the worship of those who have joy and hope, awaiting the great day when salvation comes in the return of Christ.

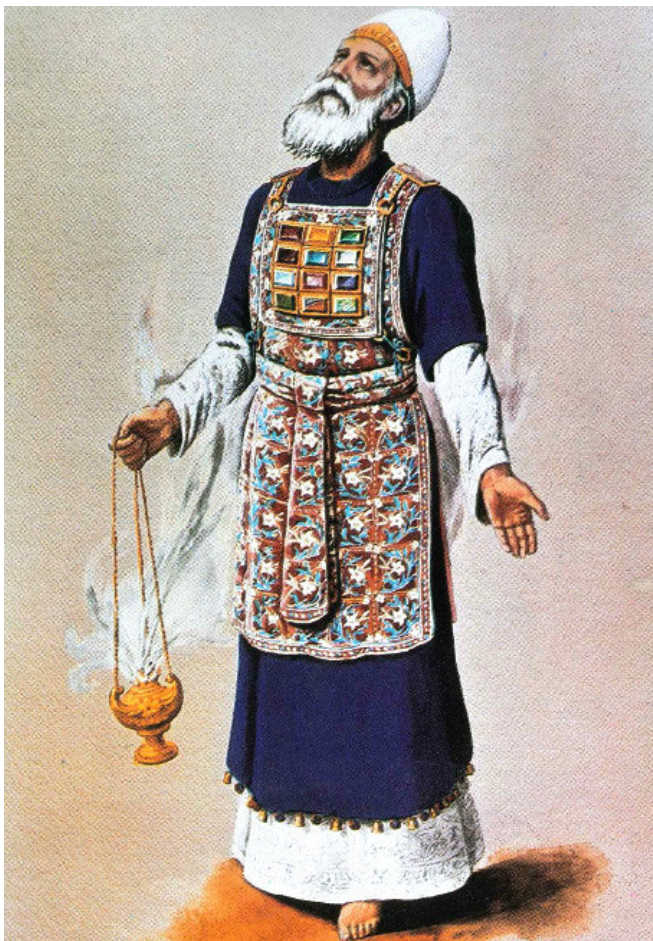
Final Thoughts

The High Priestly ministry of Jesus is one of the deepest and most neglected truths in the Bible. Christians serve an exalted Lord and Savior, who is their King and Priest. Jesus mediates the New Covenant and empowers believers to know and serve Him. Jesus is the Intercessor who prays for His people that their faith will not fail, but remain steadfast.

The truth of the ministry of High Priest is needed today, as many believers struggle with assurance and perseverance. The truth of Jesus mediating His covenant is of great assurance, not only to those who struggle with doubt, sin, and more, but is a great confidence to those who proclaim the Gospel. The ministry of Jesus as High Priest confronts the pride of man by revealing an exalted Savior who is supreme. Ultimately the ministry of Jesus as High Priest demonstrates His superiority by revealing how Jesus is the only way, the truth, and the life. Jesus is superior in every way, and He alone reigns supreme over His creation and His people.

The Sufficiency and Superiority of Christ's High Priestly Ministry

By Dave Jenkins



The writer of Hebrews focuses not on any earthly ministry—not on believers and not on an earthly priest—but on Jesus Christ in heaven.

It is His person and work that the author of Hebrews has been expounding on since the beginning of chapter 7. It was Christ who draws the attention of the reader to verse 1, *“The point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest.”*

The final section of Hebrews 7 served as the climax of a crescendo that had been building throughout the chapter. Now, at the beginning of chapter 8, the author regroups and prepares the reader for the next

climb up to a higher level still. The main point the author wants the reader to grasp before moving onward is the superiority of Christ's priestly ministry in Heaven.

Chapter seven concludes by saying that Christ "has been made perfect" (Hebrews 7:28). Now Hebrews 8 continues by saying, "We have such a high priest"—that is a perfect one. Whereas the earthly priests of Israel were imperfect, Christ is perfect. This speaks both to His sinless person and to His work on earth that accomplished all that was needed for Him to be a high priest forever. Jesus was perfect in His person from start to finish in His earthly life, but His work on our behalf was also perfect.

Jesus is Both Priest and King

Believers have such a high priest, as we read, "...*who is seated at the right hand of the throne of Majesty in heaven*" (Hebrews 8:1). In other words, Jesus has taken His royal place at Heaven's throne. This is never true in Israel; the men who ruled as kings were not the men who served before the Lord as priests. Christians have One who ascends to the throne over His people; the One who comes to play such a pivotal role on their behalf, the King who single-handedly determines God's attitude toward all his people, is none other than the great High Priest, Jesus Christ. His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and He will reign forever and ever. This is good news for Christians, because they need not fear a change in regime since He is an everlasting King, ruling an everlasting Kingdom.

"There is nothing more for Him to do to win His people to salvation..."

The superiority of Christ also draws attention to the "one who is seated" (Hebrews 8:1). Jesus sitting emphasizes that His work is accomplished once for all, a superior ministry that offers final eternal peace to weary sinners, now forgiven and accepted by God in Heaven. There is nothing more for Him to do to win His people to salvation, nothing more

for them to do than to rest with joy in Him. The salvation He accomplished is truly “finished”.

The superiority of Christ’s priestly ministry is the power with which He presently reigns. Hebrews 8:1 says He sits at the right hand of the Majesty in Heaven—that is, of God the Father Himself. Matthew Henry explains:

“The authority he exercises for the glory of his Father, for his own honour, and for the happiness of all who belong to him; and he will by his almighty power bring every one of them in their own order to the right hand of God in heaven, as members of his mystical body, that where he is they may be also.”^[1]

Christ and the Assurance of the Christian

The assurance of the believer is grounded in the fact that Christ is seated in Heaven. Jesus is the forerunner of His people—for they are seated in Heaven—and guarantees their place. This is what Paul is getting at in Ephesians 2:6 when he says of Jesus, *“and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.”* Paul

could say this in the past tense—that believers have already been raised and seated with Christ, because Jesus is there for them; in Him shall they be there too and even are represented there now. Thus, Christians learn that they find full assurance of salvation in Christ, who is seated in Heaven. Because of His authority in Heaven, Jesus is confident of our salvation, saying in John’s Gospel: *“And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day”* (John 6:39).

Believers can be confident of their salvation because they are in Christ, who is seated in Heaven, and also because Christ is *in* His people. He is working with the power of the Holy Spirit, who is at work in

“Believers can be confident of their salvation because they are in Christ, who is seated in Heaven...”

their hearts, because He is the One who has been crucified—dead to sin’s influence, He is victorious over sin. Jesus is alive with resurrection power and is reigning with authority. The Westminster Shorter Catechism explains that Jesus fulfills His office as King *“in subduing us to himself, in ruling and defending us, and in restraining and conquering all his and our enemies.”*^[2]

He has the power to win His people’s hearts, to rule them, to govern them, to shape and change them, and to protect them in their pilgrim quest through a dark and dangerous world. Therefore, Christians ought to not be afraid, since Christ’s superior ministry wins their salvations and guarantees it from the throne at God’s right hand.

The Superiority of Christ

The final feature of Christ’s superiority is laid out in verse 2, which says that the High Priest, Jesus, is *“a minister in the holy places, in the true tent that the Lord set up, not man.”* This theme is picked up in Hebrews 8:4-5, *“Now if he were on earth, he would not be a priest at all, since there are priests who offer gifts according to the law. They serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things. For when Moses was about to erect the tent, he was instructed by God, saying, ‘See that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain.’”*

This statement fends off criticism that was leveled against Christians by the Jewish community—namely that Christians had no priest. The writer of the Hebrews insists that this is not a sign of weakness, but rather of Christianity’s superiority. Christians have a priest, but not one on the earth. Indeed, the earthly priesthood is nothing more than a “copy and shadow” of the true priestly ministry in Heaven, which is the priesthood of Jesus Christ.

Jesus is not just a pilgrim on His way. The cross is no longer before Him. He has no more trials, no more foes, no more work to be done. He has arrived at His appointed destination, and there He ministers for His people, until He comes again to bring history to a close. Jesus is there in

Heaven, the true tabernacle where God Himself dwells, and it is the goal of His superior ministry to bring His people to where He is: near to God in Heaven. It is His work to do all these things for those He saved, and He will do it. He is Himself, as he said in John 14:6, *“Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.’”* When God’s people come to Jesus, he brings them to God, to Heaven, and to eternal life. He brings His people home because He knows the way and has opened it for them.

The Superiority of Jesus’ Covenant

Hebrews 8:6 wraps up the discussion on the superiority of Jesus’ ministry by stating that His covenant is superior, having better promises.

“His ministry is superior in every way because He saves His people to the uttermost.”

The covenant Jesus offers us a better covenant—a better way of salvation—better than anything ever offered to mankind before. It is superior because Jesus is superior, since His work actually saves His people. He doesn’t give His people the chance to be saved, to save themselves, or to be saved by others—He saves them.

He wins His people’s salvation by His perfect and finished work, a work so finished that He sat down. He applies that salvation to His people with His power and authority, ruling over them, in them, and for them, so that His kingdom will be established. He awaits His people in Heaven; not passively seeing if they will make it. He draws His people to Himself by His divine power. *“I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you”* (John 14:18). All of this points to the fact that the salvation Christ accomplished is complete and sure. His ministry is superior in every way because He saves His people to the uttermost.

The recovery of this gospel—which speaks of the sufficiency of Jesus Christ—has always brought joy to the Church. Christians will never have the joy of

salvation if they are relying on their own works. But when they rely completely on Christ—both His perfect offering for them and His present ministry on their behalf—they have a joy that nothing can take away.

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[1] Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 6 vols. (New York: Fleming H. Revell, n.d.), 6:742

[2] The Westminster Shorter Catechism Q/A 26 http://www.reformed.org/documents/index.html?mainframe=http://www.reformed.org/documents/WSC_frames.html

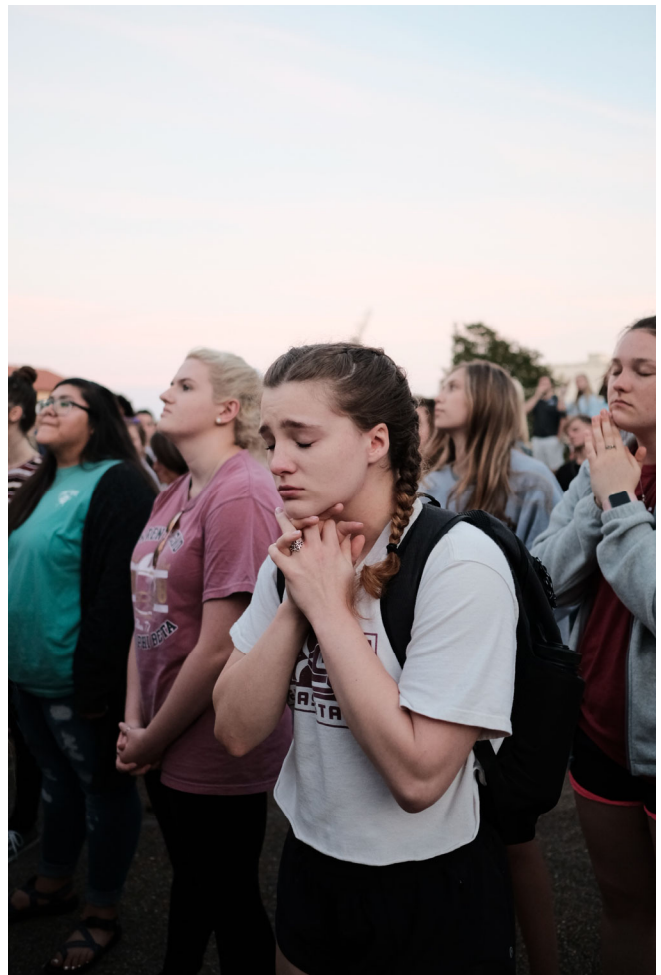
Assurance, Perseverance, and the High Priestly Ministry of Jesus

By Dave Jenkins

Jesus Christ meets the qualifications to be the Mediator and High Priest to His people. Someone may be qualified for a position without actually having the authority to hold it. Qualification is a prerequisite, but there must be an appointment to the office if the work is to be acceptable and binding. Hebrews 5:4-6 teaches that Jesus is not only qualified to be High Priest, but that God has also appointed Him to this office.

The Appointment of Jesus as High Priest

This matter of appointment is vital for two reasons: the first is that it determines the way the office is carried out. Verses 4 and 5 make this point: “And no one takes this



honor for himself, but only when called by God, just as Aaron was. So also, Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him who said to him, “You are my Son, today I have begotten you.” A true priest is not one who has acted to elevate himself in the eyes of men or God. A true priest is motivated solely by a desire to honor God and serve men, without concern for personal advancement.

Jesus Came To Do the Will of His Father

Jesus did not come to Earth seeking glory for Himself, but to do the will of His Father in Heaven. “If I glorify myself,” He said, “my glory is nothing. It is my Father who glorifies me” (John 8:54).

Philip Hughes observes, *“In assuming the office of savior and high priest, so far was the Son from exalting and glorifying himself that he accepted it knowing full well that it meant for him the experience of the darkest depth of humiliation, rejection, agony and death.”*^[1]

“He has gone into Heaven to offer His sacrificial blood for His people’s sake.”

The writer of Hebrews has long ago explained the matter of believers’ perseverance. He compares his reader’s situation to Israel’s in the desert, when many fell away through disobedience, unbelief, and rebellion. This ought to cause God’s people to ask, “How will I fare in the years ahead? Will I persevere through my own struggles and temptations?”

The High Priestly Ministry of Jesus Assures Us

The answer to these questions, and the need of assurance for Christians, is the reason for Jesus Christ’s appointment as High Priest. He has already completed the work of dying for sin. He has gone into Heaven to offer His sacrificial blood for His people’s sake. There He now sits, enthroned as a priest, who ministers on behalf of His people—praying for them, interceding on their behalf to the Father, and sending the heavenly manna needed to feed and tend to the faith of God’s people. What good news this is! James Boice sums up the point for us:

“The reason the saints will persevere is that Jesus has done everything necessary for their salvation. Since he has made a perfect atonement for their sin and since God has sworn to accept Jesus’ work, the believer can be as certain that he or she will be in heaven as that Jesus himself is there.”^[2]

References:

- ^[1] Philip E. Hughes, *A Commentary On The Epistle of Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 180.
^[2] James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms*, v.3 vol. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 3:902.

Our Confidence in the High Priestly Ministry of Jesus

By Dave Jenkins



In Hebrews 2:14, the writer says it is “our confession” that Christians must hold fast to.

The early church employed theological formulas to express the faithful’s confession like the

Apostle’s Creed. These confessions remind believers that there is true content to their profession of faith. Some people say they are against creeds, but creeds are simply summaries of biblical teaching. The Latin word *credo* means, “I believe”. It matters what Christians believe—there is content they cannot let go of without letting go of salvation in Christ; things like who Jesus is and what He has done to save His people from

their sins. J.C. Ryle explains:

“A Religion without doctrine or dogma is a thing which many are fond of talking of in the present day. It sounds very fine at first. It looks very pretty at a distance. But the moment we sit down to examine and consider it, we shall find it a simple impossibility. We might as well talk of a body without bones and sinews. No man will ever be anything or do anything in religion, unless he believes something. No one ever fights earnestly against the world, the flesh and the devil, unless he has engraven on his heart certain great principles which he believes.”[\[1\]](#)

The writer of Hebrews goes on to give God’s people a doctrinal reason why they are to persevere. There is a motivation for God’s people to enter into a life of struggle and strife, holding fast to the confession of the faith is given in Hebrews 4:15, *“Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.”* The reason behind the believers’ perseverance is the person and work of Jesus Christ, who—as the Son of God and the Great High Priest over His people—has secured their salvation. Jesus and His saving work are set forth here as the antidote to fear: fear of failure, fear of falling away, and even the fear of drawing near to God that paralyzes so many Christians.

“When the writer of Hebrews speaks of Jesus as the High Priest over His people...what he emphasizes is Christ’s atoning work...”

Many Christians struggle in their relationship with God, especially when it comes to prayer. This reason is felt by the writer of Hebrews, and is expressed in what he said in the preceding verse: *“And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account”* (Hebrews 4:13).

The Searching Gaze of God

Anyone with any spiritual awareness is made very uneasy by the thought of God’s searching gaze. Remember the scene in the Garden of

Eden after Adam and Eve first sinned. In their original state, before they fell into sin, they were “naked and were not ashamed” (Genesis 2:25). With no sin to condemn them, they delighted in the gaze of their loving Creator. After the Fall, they hid their shame even from one another, pathetically sewing on fig leaves for garments. Even more, they dreaded the presence of God, fleeing and hiding from Him as He approached.

This is how many Christians feel in their relationship with God. The thought of His gaze chills their bones. They are willing to do anything but deal with God Himself, skulking around the edges of His light rather than drawing near to Him. They struggle to pray and seldom do unless forced by circumstances. It is this paralyzing fear that the writer of Hebrews addresses. Sinners are no longer commanded to keep their distance in fear and trembling, but on the contrary are now invited to draw near, and to do so with confidence.[\[2\]](#)

The Saving Work of Jesus

The reason for this change is the saving work of Jesus Christ, who reconciles sinners to God. In particular, two aspects of that work come into view here: He has made propitiation for His people in the heavenly tabernacle, and He now ministers on high with sympathy for His people's weaknesses.

When God discovered Adam and Eve's sin, He punished them by barring them from the Garden and cursing them. God then took the initiative in restoring them to fellowship with Himself. Genesis 3:21 tells us, “The Lord God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skin and clothed them.” God sacrificed an animal in their place and clothed them with the garment of the innocent substitute He had provided. This is a wonderful picture of what Jesus Christ has done for His people, the Lamb of God who takes away His people's sin, and whose perfect righteousness is imputed to His people.

When the writer of Hebrews speaks of Jesus as the High Priest over His people, and the priesthood of Christ becomes the dominant theme in this letter, what he emphasizes is Christ's atoning work by dying upon

the cross. He sets up a comparison between what Jesus did by dying, rising from the dead, and ascending into Heaven, versus the ceremonial office performed by Israel's high priest.

Once a year, the high priest entered the inner sanctum of the tabernacle to make atonement for the sins of the people. First, offering a sacrifice for his own sins and then cleansing himself with water, the high priest—and he alone, one day a year (and that day only)—entered into the very presence of God. There in the Holy of Holies, he saw the Ark of the Covenant, with the golden angels on top with their upswept wings, gazing down upon the two tablets of the Ten Commandments—God's law—which the people had broken by their sins. To avoid punishment, the high priest brought blood from the animal sacrifice, which he sprinkled upon the mercy seat—the tray for the blood, which interposed between God's piercing gaze and the tablets of the law. When the blood was offered, God's wrath was turned away from the people's sin.

Israel's priests pointed forward to Jesus, the Great High Priest. He is great because of His divine nature. He is the Son of God and His shed blood is sufficient to satisfy God's wrath forever. He is great because His sacrifice achieved a finished atonement, unlike the ones offered by Aaron, which had to be repeated often (daily, weekly, monthly, or even yearly). He is great because He is not a sinful man going into the holy of holies only once a year, and needing to come back again the next. Instead, He has gone through the heavens into the true tabernacle, the heavenly throne room of God, and offered His shed blood once-and-for-all. This is the contrast implicit in verse 14: unlike Aaron, who was denied entry into the Promised Land because of his sin; and unlike the high priests who followed Aaron, who were themselves sinners and could not offer the true sacrifice; Jesus has entered the land of rest—Heaven itself—and has finished redemption of His people.

The High Priestly Ministry and Reconciliation

Because Jesus is His people's High Priest, God's people are reconciled to God. This means that Christians can approach Him freely.

Christians do not have to hide from Him; they do not have to flee like Adam in the garden. The veil barring them from God's presence is torn because of the sacrifice of Christ upon the cross. Christians may now (as

the writer of Hebrews so greatly wants God's people to see) approach boldly into the presence of God, that once was barred by man's sin. "The Lord that Christians serve, the Savior to whom they look, is not aloof from the trials they experience..."

The mercy seat was the place where sinners might approach the holy God, in safety and with confidence. This is what God said to Moses in the wilderness:

"There I will meet with you, and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim that are on the ark of the testimony, I will speak with you about all that I will give you in commandment for the people of Israel" (Exodus 25:22). This is where believers meet safely and peacefully with the Lord our God, at the place made safe by the blood offered by Jesus the High Priest.

The Sympathy of Christ

The second aspect of Christ's priestly ministry is the sympathy He bears for His people. Hebrews 4:15 states, *"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin."* This is a point the author has made before, and it's an important one. The Lord that Christians serve, the Savior to whom they look, is not aloof from the trials they experience but feels them with an intimate acquaintance. He is not disinterested or cold toward what Christians are going through; He came to earth and took upon man's human nature precisely so that He might now be able to have fellowship with His people. Therefore, He is eminently able to represent God's people before the throne of His heavenly Father, pleading their case, securing their place, and procuring the spiritual resources they need.

That is the reason why Christians must not give up, because Christ

is there—in heaven—bearing human flesh, having endured what His people are going through now (and more), yet without Himself falling into sin. His righteousness represents God's people before God's throne, and grants them access to the Father; His prayers plead for their sustenance and intercede on behalf of all His peoples' needs. *"Here am I, and the children God has given me,"* Jesus declared upon His arrival in Heaven (Hebrews 2:13). He has opened the way for all His people, established their place where He is, and now He prays for their spiritual provision and protection to the Father who is certain to receive His every petition.

Jesus explained all this to His disciples in the upper room on the night before of His arrest. They did not fully understand as He spoke of what was to come, but they picked up enough to know that He was leaving. Jesus comforted them, saying, *"Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also"* (John 14:1-3).

Although, there will be hardships and troubles, the writer of Hebrews has assured God's people of this by comparing their earthly pilgrimage to Israel's journey through the wilderness on the way to the Promised Land. Jesus assured His disciples: *"I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live"* (John 14:18-19). What a great reason this is for hope, and what strength it gives to persevere to God's people.

Perseverance and the High Priestly Ministry of Jesus

The reason why Christians are to persevere is the High-Priestly ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. His ministry reconciles His people to the Father and opens Heaven's chest of grace. This makes possible the great resource of prayer, to which the writer now turns: *"Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need"* (Hebrews 4:16).

To approach the throne of God in prayer on the basis of Christ's high priestly ministry is to come to His propitiating sacrifice and present intercession. The language used here in Hebrews 4:16 is striking and clear. By telling God's people to come before His throne, the author reminds God's people that it is the place where blood has been offered for His people—the mercy seat where God calls sinners to meet with Him. God's people are also reminded that it is to a King that they are to come.

“Instead of judgment, Christians find themselves in a position as favored children— invited to bring their entire request to the King of Heaven.”

In a great sermon on this text, Charles Haddon Spurgeon worked out some of the implications on how Christians are to approach God in prayer. He says:

“The first is that Christians must come in lowly reverence. If Christians show great respect in the courts of earthly majesty—in the White House, for example, or Buckingham Palace-- then surely God's people will come with even greater reverence before the throne of heaven. There is no place for pride or vanity here, and if God's people could see what really is before them spiritually they would tremble at its awesome majesty. Spurgeon writes, “His throne is a great white throne, unspotted, and clear as crystal. Familiarity there may be, but let it not be unhallowed. Boldness there should be, but let it not be impertinent.”^[3]

Prayer and Joy

Secondly, Christians should come to God in prayer with great joy. The reason Christians should come with great joy is because the favor that has been extended to them is such a high privilege. Instead of judgment, Christians find themselves in a position as favored children— invited to bring their entire request to the King of Heaven.

Confidence and the Christian

Christians should come to God with confidence, knowing that they

will be favorably received, knowing that they can speak freely, and knowing that this is a throne of grace. This is only possible because of the High Priest, who has gone ahead, securing access for His people by His blood and interceding prayers. Many Christians struggle with prayer. They tremble as if the light from God's throne exposed them in a naked shame, when, in fact, it reveals the radiant robes that have been draped around them—the righteousness of Christ, given to all who trust in Him. The key to prayer—to often praying, to praying openly, to praying boldly and freely, and with gladness of heart—is to know that one is clothed in the righteousness of Jesus Christ; invited to His own saving ministry, purchased by His precious blood, and anticipated by His sym-

pathetic intercession. This is the secret to lively and happy prayer.

“God requires His people to persevere in faith through the trials of the Christian life.”

It is to the throne of God which people come—it is a throne of grace. This means that when God's people come, their sins are covered by the blood of Jesus Christ, and they are looked upon with compassion. Stumbling prayers are not criticized,

but are received with kindness. Moreover, Jesus' priestly ministry secures the Holy Spirit's help. The Apostle Paul writes in Romans 8:26, *“Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.”* God's Spirit helps His people to pray, and He graciously interprets His people's prayers with the heart of a Father.

Furthermore, because it is a throne of grace to which God's people come, He is ready to grant the requests of His people. He is glad to provide for their needs; to give strength to persevere through trials to His people. He says, *“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”* The writer continues saying, *“Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me”* (2nd Corinthians 12:9). One commentator explains, “Man

needs mercy for past failure, and grace for present and future work. Mercy is to be 'taken' as it is extended to man in his weakness; grace is to be 'sought' by man according to his necessity."^[4]

God requires His people to persevere in faith through the trials of the Christian life. He gives His people a great reason to press on through the saving work of the great High Priest, Jesus Christ, who is able to save to the uttermost. He has gone ahead of His people to open the doors and unlock the treasures of God's mercy and grace. Prayer is a great resource God gives His people, one that must not be neglected if one is to grow strong in the faith and persevere through difficulties. Prayer brings one to a throne of power and authority, but also a throne of grace to all who are in Christ. Therefore, let us draw near to God with reverence, with joy, with great expectation, and especially with confidence that belongs to sons and daughters of the King of Heaven and Earth.

Spurgeon provides us a fitting conclusion about the difference God's grace makes for God's people:

I could not say to you, "Pray," not even to you saints, unless it were a throne of grace, much less I could talk of prayer to you sinners; but now I will say this to every sinner here, though he should think himself to be the worst sinner that every lived, cry unto the lord and seek him while he may be found. A throne of grace is a place fitted for you: go to your knees, by simple faith go to your Savior, for he, he it is who is the throne of grace."^[5]

References:

- ^[1] J.C. Ryle, *Holiness* (Darlington, U.K: Evangelical Press, 1979), 56.
- ^[2] Philip E. Hughes, *A Commentary On The Epistle of Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 173-174.
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Jesus' High Priestly Ministry and Temptation

By Dave Jenkins



In Hebrews 2:11, the author has demonstrated that Jesus and His people belong to the same family; the implication is that Jesus has assumed our human nature. Now the

author indicates that the necessity of delivering His people from their enemies—death and Satan—meant that Jesus had to become man. He had to have a body of flesh and blood, and had to be *fully* human, in order to set His people free. Delivering His followers from the curse of sin and the clutches of the Devil demanded nothing short of taking the place of those whom God had given Him, but who stood condemned because of their sin.

The author of Hebrews elaborates more on this point in Hebrews 4:14 with the phrase "the Son of God", which is a reference to both the title of humanity (Jesus) and of deity (Son of God). The writer in Hebrews 4:15 adds to his statements in Hebrews 2:18 that Jesus was sinless. Jesus was able to be tempted (Matthew 4:1-11), but not able to sin (Hebrews 7:26). Though Jesus was tempted in every respect—that is, in every area of personal life—He (unlike every other human) remained sinless, and thus He is truly the holy high priest (Hebrews 5:2-3; Hebrews 7:26-28). In their temptations, Christians can be comforted with the truth that nothing entices them that is foreign to their Lord. He, too, has felt the tug of sin, and yet never gave in to such temptations.

The Two-Fold Result of Christ's Death

The result of Christ's death is twofold: He conquered Satan and set His people free from the fear of death. Satan, the murderer from the beginning, desires man's death in the fullest sense of the word: physical and spiritual death. Since the death of Jesus on Calvary's cross, death has lost its power and its effect. Through death, the Christian does not enter Hell, but Heaven. And because Jesus' human body was resurrected, the believer's body also shall come forth from the grave in the last day to be 'glorified'.

Jesus' humanity can be demonstrated, as the author of Hebrews teaches in verse 2:18, by the fact that He *was tempted*. Dr. Guthrie notes that because of His suffering, Christ is able to help believers in their temptation.^[1] Christ personally experienced the power of sin when Satan confronted Him, and when the weaknesses of His human nature

became evident. Jesus experienced hunger when He was tempted by Satan in the wilderness, thirst when He asked the woman at Jacob's Well for water, weariness when He slept while the storm raged on the Sea of Galilee, and sorrow when He wept at the grave of Lazarus.

The Active Help of Jesus in Temptation

As High Priest, through His sacrificial work, Jesus removed the curse of God that rested on man. Because of the forgiveness of sin, God's love flows freely to the redeemed, and Jesus stands ready to help. Those who are being tempted may experience the active support of Jesus. They can expect nothing short of perfect understanding from Jesus, because He Himself suffered when He was tempted. Jesus did not share with man the experience of sin; instead, because of His sinlessness, He fully experienced the intensity of temptation.

Christ is Like Us, but Unlike Us

Christ's ability to sympathize and help is the result of His likeness to us. He was tested in every respect, but did not sin. The verb "*to test*" or "*tempt*" was used in Hebrews 2:18, where His testing was related to His suffering and death. His own experience of suffering and trials during His earthly life equipped Him so that He is able to support His people in their sufferings and temptations.

Christ's likeness to us meant that He was tested in every way and yet without sin. The qualifying phrase "without sin", in Hebrews 4:15, does not resist the reality or likeness of testing, but relates exclusively to its outcome: that is, without the result of sin. Jesus was faithful to the One who appointed Him (Hebrews 3:2). He was tested to the very limit—His shame-filled death (Hebrews 12:2; 13:12)—but did not sin. Jesus is a faithful and merciful High Priest, whose sympathy for His people in their weakness will prove to be a powerful help to those being tempted.

Profound Hope and Help in Jesus

For those who are tempted and facing various trials, the confidence of forgiven sins, and God's anger turned aside by their merciful High

Priest (Hebrews 2:17), is a profound hope. The emphasis in Hebrews 2:18 on Christ's personal experience of temptation, teaches that this help includes strength for Christians to stand firm in the face of their own trials—particularly those temptations to be disloyal to God and to give up their Christian profession. Later, Hebrews draws attention to a further dimension of Jesus' powerful help: namely, His ongoing intercessory role as High Priest, by which He will save His people completely (Hebrews 7:25). Because Christ Himself suffered—and His suffering was the source of His temptation—He is able to come to the powerful aid of His brothers and sisters, who themselves are tempted and exposed to humiliation in a hostile world.

The fact that Christ intercedes and has gone through similar temptations as every believer, and withstood them victoriously is a source of great assurance for the believer.^[2] Jesus Christ is able and willing to help man oppose the power of sin and temptation. As He said to the sinful woman in the house of Simon the Pharisee, "Your sins are forgiven [...] go in peace" (Luke 7:48, 50), so also Jesus shows mercy, peace, and love to His people; as He is our sympathetic High Priest.

References:

- ^[1] George H. Guthrie, *Hebrews: The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1998), 111.
- ^[2] F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews Revised* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1990), 89.

The Incarnation and Jesus' High Priestly Ministry

By Dave Jenkins



Several of the earliest controversies and key battles in Church History were over Christ's divine and human natures. One of

the classic texts to explain why Jesus Christ had to become fully man, so that He might perform priestly service before God on man's behalf, is Hebrews 2:17-18. Christ's priestly ministry propitiated (or turned aside) God's wrath against man's sin. The classic explanation of this doctrine was given by Anselm of Canterbury 900 years ago in his towering work, *Cur Deus Homo*, (meaning "Why God Became Man").

Speaking of the payment that must be made for man's sins, Anselm wrote:

“It could not have been done unless man paid what was owing to God for sin. But the debt was so great that, while man alone owed it, only God could pay it, so that the same person must be both man and God. Thus it was necessary for God to take manhood into the unity of his person, so that he who in his own nature ought to pay and could not should be in a person who could.”[\[i\]](#)

Anselm of Canterbury gets to the heart of what the writer of Hebrews teaches in Hebrews 2:17: *“He had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest.”* The Old Testament priest represented God before man, which was why the high priest was garbed with glory and honor (Exodus 28:2). The high priest’s apparel gleamed, to portray the righteousness of God before the people of God. This is why the high priest wore an ephod of gold, upon which were fastened twelve stones, bearing the names of the twelve tribes of Israel (Exodus 28:9-12).

The purpose of the incarnation is that Christ, as the God-Man, might bear His people’s names upon His shoulders. As the true High Priest, Jesus Christ is garbed in His own perfect righteousness, which He now presents on behalf of His redeemed people. Jesus went forth as the minister and representative of His people, offering His own precious blood—His divine and infinitely valuable life—which alone atones for the debt of, not only one man’s sin, but the sins of the whole world.

The work of Christ was one of turning aside God’s wrath against man’s sin. Christ’s work of propitiation gets to the reason that He was born into the world—so that, by His death as the God-Man, He might break the hold of death on sinners, and set His people free through the cross and resurrection. While this explains the first and second reasons why Christ had to become a man and die, Hebrews 2:18 gives the third reason, *“Because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.”*

Jesus is able to help His people in whatever circumstances they find themselves, because He suffered in His people’s place on the way to

His death and on the cross dying for their sins. The fact that Christ has done all of this is proof of His full humanity, in that “he himself has suffered when tempted”. Christians often want to dismiss Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness, but there Jesus was afflicted with great hunger and the temptation to accept the crown without the cross. While these were great temptations, Jesus overcame them all. As a result of Jesus temptation and suffering, He knows what His people are going through whether they are struggling with a variety of temptations or going through hard times. Jesus knows what it is like to go through hardship because He endured the sins of humanity on the cross. Jesus the High Priest over His people has real sympathy and compassion for what His people are going through.

Some people think Jesus didn’t know the full range of human experience because He wasn’t a sinner. This questions whether or not He can have full sympathy for sinners. Far from Jesus knowing less than His

<p>“Jesus has real and knowledgeable sympathy with those who are tempted...”</p>	<p>people do about temptation, Jesus knows far more about temptation than His people do because He endured it to the point of sweating blood in the Garden of Gethsemane, where He felt the weight of man’s sin in preparing to die on the cross.</p>
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B.F. Westcott is correct when he observes: *“Sympathy with the sinner in his trial does not depend on the experience of sin but on the experience of the strength of temptation to sin, which only the sinless can know in its full intensity. He who falls yields before the last strain.”*^[ii]

Jesus has real and knowledgeable sympathy with those who are tempted, which is why the Scriptures say that He is able to help His people. Jesus is not “just like us”. Jesus is the Redeemer, and His people are the sinners in need of such a champion. Jesus’ work is hardly impersonal or mechanical; it is heartfelt and sensitive. Jesus felt the nails as they were driven into His hands and feet, so that He might rescue His

people from the power of death. The quality of mercy of Christ's work is intimate, personal, and knowing. This intimate, personal, and knowing

work calls His people to love Him as a Savior, who has gone to such lengths to know His people in the midst of their trials, to have the fellowship of suffering. Jesus' suffering means that He is able to help His people and understand all of what they are going through. Whenever God's people encounter difficult circumstances or trials, they have a sympathetic and merciful High Priest who hears when His people cry out to Him. Understanding Jesus as High Priest ought to be a great encouragement to God's people—that they can turn to the Lord in prayer in whatever circumstances they find themselves in.

One of the major aspects of Jesus' High Priestly ministry is His ability now to save His people. His ability to save them means His people can trust Him, knowing that death will bring them no harm, but rather bring them to Jesus. His people can trust Him for today, knowing He knows and understands any and all present temptations and struggles. Jesus is able to help His people, by praying for them before the throne of His Father in Heaven, and by sending the Holy Spirit into their hearts, giving them strength that is of Him. This is why Paul said, *"I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me"* (Galatians 2:20). Despite all of Paul's many trials, it was with knowledge of Christ's personal power that he could declare: *"I can do all things through him who strengthens me"* (Philippians 4:13).

Jesus Christ, God's own Son, became a man to be a total Savior, sufficient for the whole range of

every need. People are lamenting daily in this ‘world of woe’, asking, “Where is God? Why doesn’t He do something?” Meanwhile, He has done everything—indeed, more than they could ever ask for or imagine. God has entered into man’s world. He has walked through the dust of this earth.

He who is Life has wept before the grave, and He who is the Bread of Life has felt the aching of hunger in His belly. He has taken the thorns that afflict this sin-scarred world and allowed them to be woven into a crown to be pressed upon His head. He has stretched open His arms in love, that the hands that wove creation might be nailed to a wooden cross. Then He rose from the dead, conquering all that would conquer His people, setting His people free to live in peace and joy before the face of God.

References:

- [i] Anselm of Canterbury, *Why God Became Man*, in Eugene PR. Fairweather, *A Scholastic Miscellany: Anselm to Ockham* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961), 176.
- [ii] B.F. Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (London: Macmillan, 1903), 59.

Recommended Reading on Jesus' High Priestly Ministry

In this issue of *Theology for Life Magazine*, we've been considering the subject of Jesus's High Priestly ministry and what that means for daily Christian living and ministry. We understand that we haven't covered everything on this topic, but it is our prayer that, hopefully, readers of this issue of *Theology for Life* will grow in their understanding of it so they can stand fast on the Word of God.

If you've found this issue helpful and would like to study this subject further, please check out the following reading list below. These books are at the top of their genre in both excellence and readability.

- *The Priesthood of Christ: Its Necessity and Nature* by John Owen
- *A Merciful and Faithful High Priest: Studies in the Book of Hebrews* by Martyn Lloyd-Jones

I hope you find these as helpful in your walk with the Lord as I have.

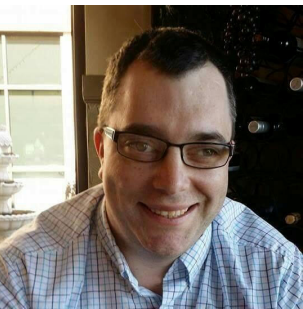
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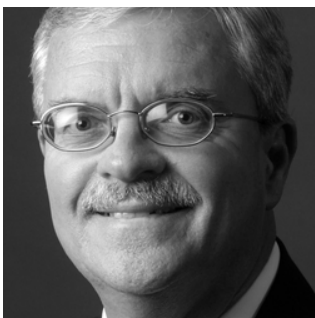
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