

Word of God. They reserved the right to interpret the Scriptures to the clergy. It was Luther who restored the office of believers to the saints, in Jehovah's mercy.

We have the Spirit of Christ and we are now all, by God's grace, priests. We can come to God through Jesus Christ our mediator and intercessor. We need not come with a cow in tow for Christ made the perfect sacrifice that opened the way into the holy of holies (Heb. 9:24). We need not a Roman Catholic priest to whom we must make confession. We have our great high priest in heaven, and we are all priests in Him. We are all priests who bring the sacrifice of praise, obedience and thanksgiving (Rom. 12:1-2; I Pet. 2:9).

We need no king to rule over us—other than Christ Himself, whose slaves we are. We rule over our lives through the power of the Spirit and we do so by the Word of God which is our guide. And, by the way, this truth is the basis for Christian liberty.

The *Heidelberg Catechism* puts it beautifully when it claims that we bear the name of Christ when we are called Christians. "But why art thou called a Christian? Because I am a member of Christ by faith, and thus am partaker of His anointing; that so I may confess His name, and present myself a living sacrifice of thankfulness to Him; and also that with a free and good conscience I may fight against sin and Satan in this life, and afterwards reign with Him eternally over all creatures" (Q. & A. 32).

But there is more. The text also says, "I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more" (Jer. 31:34). This too is a blessing of the new covenant. The meaning is not that the Old Testament people of God did not know the forgiveness of sins, for the Psalms testify to the opposite (e.g., Ps. 32). But Christ had not come as yet to make the sacrifice for sin, and so their knowledge of the forgiveness of their sin was less complete and less clear than after Christ's sacrifice was made.

Hebrews 10:1-18 teaches this very plainly. (We keep going back to Hebrews for it is the great book of the Bible that tells us how much better the new covenant is than the old.) The author tells us that sacrifices had to be made continually because the people continued to have conscience of sins. But Christ's sacrifice is perfect and there is no more conscience of sin because our exalted Lord gives us the Spirit and assures us that the debt of our transgressions has been paid at the cross so that our consciences are purged in the blood of Christ. That too is part of the new covenant.

We will return to this great subject in the next issue of the *News*. *Prof. Hanko*

NOW BROADCASTING LIVE! The CPRC is now video streaming both its Sunday worship services live and free on the internet. Just go to www.cprf.co.uk/live.html each Lord's Day at 11 AM and 6 PM (GMT) and join us on-line!

Covenant Protestant Reformed Church

83 Clarence Street, Ballymena, BT43 5DR • Lord's Day services at 11 am & 6 pm

Website: www.cprc.co.uk • Live broadcast: www.cprf.co.uk/live

Pastor: Angus Stewart, 7 Lislunna Road, Kells, N. Ireland, BT42 3NR • (028) 25 891851

pastor@cprc.co.uk • www.youtube.com/cprcni • www.facebook.com/CovenantPRC

Covenant Reformed News

March 2014 • Volume XIV, Issue 23

Christ's Melchizedekian Priesthood (2)

Many things are asserted of Melchizedek in the subordinate clauses of Hebrews 7:1-3. But this is the main statement of that long sentence: "For this Melchisedec ... made like unto the Son of God; abideth a priest continually" (1, 3). To put it simply, Melchizedek is a type of Jesus Christ in that God "made [him] like unto the Son of God." Melchizedek is a type of Jesus Christ not with regard to His divine and human natures, nor His prophetic office (Moses is the great type of Christ as prophet, according to Deuteronomy 18:15-19). Melchizedek is a type of Christ in His priestly office, for he was "made like unto the Son of God; [and] abideth a *priest* continually."

This turns the argument of the Jews against Christ's priesthood on its head. First, Christ has the office of priest according to the Torah or the five books of Moses (Gen. 14:18-20) and the Psalms (Ps. 110:4), so His priesthood is in accordance with Old Testament prophecy and typology. Second, Christ's priesthood is more ancient than the Aaronic priesthood, for the latter came about 400 years later. Third, Christ's priesthood is a much better priesthood in so many ways, as Hebrews 7 makes clear.

We are not impressed with the fidelity of the Jewish priesthood (cf. Mal. 2:8-9). Just think of the biblical record of their sins! Aaron made the golden calf (Ex. 32). His two oldest sons, Nadab and Abihu, offered strange fire and were consumed by the Lord (Lev. 10). Eli failed to discipline his two sons effectively (I Sam. 2-3). These two priests, Hophni and Phinehas, fornicated at the tabernacle, oppressed the people and stole from God's offerings (I Sam. 2-3). Time and time again, the priests were idolatrous, especially in the days of King Ahaz and King Manasseh, and opposed God's true prophets. Finally, Caiaphas, the high priest, with the chief priests, condemned Jesus Christ and saw to it that He was crucified. Then they persecuted the apostolic church.

The Jews did not faithfully adhere to their priesthood. Instead, they often joined in with the sins of the priests and loved "to have it so" (Jer. 5:31). From Jeroboam onwards, the ten northern tribes rejected the Aaronic priesthood (I Kings 12:26-33). Even Judah did not always pay tithes to the priests and Levites (Neh. 13:10-11; Mal. 3:7-9). During the wilderness wanderings, the Israelites frequently complained against Moses and Aaron, their first high priest. On one notorious occasion, they claimed that the sons of Levi took "too much upon" themselves (Num. 16:7). Numbers 16-17 records how God put down their wicked rebellion against the house of Aaron.

When the Messiah came, Israel crucified Him, claiming instead that they were faithful to the priests in the line of Aaron according to Jehovah's law! Thus they rejected Christ's superior Melchizedekian priesthood and the only sacrifice for sin! *Rev. Stewart*

The Old and the New Covenants (1)

A reader asks, “What are the implications of Jeremiah 31:34 for the church today? Concerning the new covenant it says, ‘And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD; for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.’ Does it teach, as I have heard, that under the new covenant the church is to be a purer institution than it was under the old covenant, made up only of those who ‘know the Lord,’ i.e., truly born again believers?”

No, the text in Jeremiah 31:34 does not teach that the New Testament church is a purer church than the church of the old dispensation. One need only read Hebrews 11 and one cannot help but marvel at the strength of the faith of Old Testament saints, whose faith so often surpasses ours.

By the way, the entire passage in Jeremiah 31:31-34 is quoted in Hebrews 8:8-12 and partly in Hebrews 10:16-17. Somewhat similar language is also found in Ezekiel 16:60-62.

The text teaches a profound truth concerning God’s gracious covenant with His people. We must remember that the passing away of the old covenant and the establishment of the new covenant took place with the work of our Lord Jesus Christ when He suffered and died and rose again from the dead. The climax of His work was the outpouring of the Spirit on Pentecost. And, if I may insert a parenthetical point here, Pentecost was not the first New Testament revival. It had nothing to do with revivals. Nor was it the second blessing, as Pentecostals claim. It was far more wonderful than that. It was the gift of the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of the ascended Lord to the church!

In a certain sense of the word, the Old Testament saints did not possess the Spirit. I know that my statement evokes a gasp from many, but it is nevertheless true. Consider, for example, what Jesus Himself said in John 7:39. On the great day of the feast, Jesus cried out in the temple, “If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink” (37). John explains what Jesus meant in verse 39: “But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.”

You have probably noticed that in my quotation of John 7:39, I omitted the word “given.” But this is necessary. In our AV, the word is in italics, which means that it does not appear in the original, but was added by the translators. The translators often did this, for Greek and English are two quite different languages. And most of the time, the English additions are helpful. But here the word “given” ought not to appear in the text, so the clause should read: “For the Holy Ghost was not yet.” In other words, He did not exist.

It is striking that John should say this under infallible inspiration, and we certainly know from all Scripture that the Holy Ghost is eternal, along with the Father and the

Son. Furthermore, we know that the Holy Spirit was present in the Old Testament, for David prayed, “Take not thy Holy Spirit from me” (Ps. 51:11). (The AV does not capitalize “Holy Spirit” in this verse, although it should have.) Further, the Holy Spirit was given to those who were anointed as prophets, priests and kings.

What then does John mean in John 7:39?

The answer is that John is referring to the Holy Spirit *as the Spirit of the exalted Christ*, for John himself adds that there was as yet no Holy Spirit, because “Jesus was not yet glorified.” This truth is the reason why Peter tells us in his great Pentecostal sermon, “Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear” (Acts 2:33).

What a difference the presence of the Spirit made in the church! Peter himself, along with the other disciples, did not understand Christ’s work. They asked at the time of His ascension, “Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6). But immediately after the Spirit was poured out on the 120 members of the church, Peter could preach a sermon in which he showed that he understood all the work of Christ. He understood the cross, the resurrection and the ascension. He even understood the passages in the Old Testament that spoke of Christ and His work. It was all quite amazing and it was due to nothing but the presence of the Spirit in the church. This points us to the difference between the old and the new covenants. The difference between the old and the new covenants is the very great difference made in the church by the outpouring of the Spirit on Pentecost.

The first and most important difference was that, while in the old dispensation the offices of prophet, priest and king were limited to special men whom God designated by the pouring on of oil, in the new dispensation all the people of God are anointed. Oil was a symbol of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit was given to Saul, David, Nathan, Isaiah, Malachi, Jehoiada, Aaron, Elijah, etc. These men were designated as prophets, priests or kings. The prophets brought the Word of God to Israel; the priests made sacrifices for the people; the kings ruled over the nation.

The people of God who did not hold an office could not perform the work of the office. They could not know the will of God, but had to go to a prophet (I Sam. 9:6-10; II Sam. 7:1-17; II Kings 22:12-20). The people could not obtain forgiveness of sins by themselves, but had to go to a priest, leading a cow or a sheep. The people could not rule themselves—as the period of the judges proved—but had to have a king, and the moral state of the nation was determined largely by the moral condition of the king.

But in the new dispensation when the Spirit is poured out, He is not poured out on specially chosen men, but on all believers. By His powerful presence, He brings Christ to us, who is our only prophet, priest and king. He, by His Spirit, makes all believers prophets, priests and kings. We need not go to a prophet anymore, for we all know the Lord. We have the Scriptures and we can know God by the Spirit through them. The Roman Catholic Church denied this truth: they refused to let the people have the