

**THE PRIESTHOOD, ITS
PRIVILEGES AND ITS
DUTIES: AN EXPOSITION
OF LEVITICUS VIII-XV**

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BY

W. KELLY.

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INTRODUCTION.

Before we enter upon the details of the types in Leviticus viii. ix., it seems well to speak of priesthood generally, and also in special reference to Christianity.

The priest offered gifts and sacrifices to God. In patriarchal days this fell to the head of the family, and indeed to its members also as may be seen in the very first recorded instance of Cain and Abel. But when the law came, priesthood was established in a particular family of that tribe which was chosen for divine service and separated from the inheritance of the land given to the other tribes of Israel. The Levites had therefore the tithes of the children of Israel as a heave-offering to Jehovah, but of this the Levites were bound to offer a tenth of the tithes to the priests, who had also their own special perquisites by Jehovah's command.

The Epistle to the Hebrews treats of Levitical priesthood, as well as of the sanctuary and the sacrifices, more formally and fully than any other part of the N. T., though the principle runs through the Epistles in general and even the

Revelation. To the Hebrews the utmost care was taken to lay the foundation of all that follows on the Person of Christ, Son of God in chap. i., Son of Man in chap. ii., with incontestably superior glory in both respects, whatever His humiliation in grace for our sakes, to every creature, even to angels. Such is the Apostle and High Priest of our confession. Others, as Moses, Aaron, Joshua, derived dignity from the office to which each was called of God; He had intrinsic glory and excellence which conferred lustre on all He undertook, though perfectly subject to God in all respects. As sin had ruined all creation, His death was the only door of deliverance for "everything," and the "many sons" for glory in particular, to annul the devil's power, to succour in temptation and sympathise in suffering, as well as to make propitiation for sins.

The Epistle accordingly contemplates on the one hand the partakers of a heavenly calling passing through the wilderness, and on the other Jesus the Son of God, called as Aaron, but owned of Him as His Son, and saluted as according to the order of Melchizedek. Such He is, and He only, being first by interpretation King of righteousness, and then also King of Salem, which is King of peace. The exercise is after the pattern of Aaron (intercession based on sacrificial blood-shedding), the order after that of Melchizedek, as being not a succession of priests but one ever-living priest. Thus Ps. cx. is cited as divine authority for a priesthood everlasting and intransmissible, which supersedes that of Aaron. "For such a high priest became us, holy,

guileless, undefiled, separated from sinners, and become higher than the heavens, who needeth not daily, as the high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for his own sins, then [for] those of the people; for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself. For the law appointeth men high priests having infirmity; but the word of the oath-swearing which [was] after the law, a Son perfected for ever."

Hence the doctrine of the Epistle beyond doubt is of a sole High Priest Who sat down on the right hand of the throne of the majesty in the heavens, minister of the holy place, and of the true tabernacle which the Lord pitched, not man. The redemption too is everlasting, as is the inheritance. His offering once for all has perfected, not only for ever but without interruption, the sanctified. The unity of the priesthood for the saint is as certain and plain as that of the sacrifice for our sins.

Nevertheless the same chap. x. which sums this up clearly exhorts Christians as a whole, sprinkled and washed as they were, to approach with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, as having boldness to enter the holies by the blood of Jesus, a new and living way which He dedicated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, and [having] a great priest over the house of God. The inspired writer takes his place with every other saint now, as entitled to draw near, where no son of Aaron could, and even as Aaron could not; for he had no such "boldness" when he entered on the Atonement-day with fear of death. Compare also

chap. xiii. 10, 15, 16. The apostle Peter teaches us the same truth: the believers are "a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ;" and "a royal priesthood . . . to show forth the virtues of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light" (1 Peter ii. 5-9). The Book of Revelation teaches the same truth (chap. i. 6).

Under the Levitical system the way of the holies had not yet been manifested. But by Christ's death the veil was rent; and now the way is open not by grace only but in righteousness. Earthly sacrifices, priesthood, and sanctuary alike disappear; and we who believe are privileged to approach God. Compare also Rom. v. 2, 2 Cor. iii. 18, Eph. ii. 13-18, iii. 12, Col. i. 12, 13. In the N. T. an official priest is either Jewish or heathen, never Christian; a mere and guilty imposture.

Save Christ the High Priest, alone efficacious for us, scripture recognises no priesthood but that of all Christians. To assert a sacerdotal class for us is to deny that we can offer up our spiritual sacrifices to God; it is in effect to efface the proper and revealed effect of Christ's sacrifice; it is therefore to obliterate the gospel and to restore Judaism. Not only is it a superstitious falsehood, but a contradiction of the faith "once for all" since redemption. Nay more, it essentially and systematically opposes the full and final revelation of God's word which will have the Christian to walk, not in the distance and darkness of the law, but in the light and grace of God perfectly revealed in Christ, His Father and

our Father, His God and our God. It is wholly inconsistent with the great mystery as to Christ and as to the church (Eph. v. 32). For we all compose the one body of Christ, His bride, and are members one of another, each one spirit with the Lord. Hence such a relationship is incompatible with a priestly caste nearer to God than the rest, who are able only through it to draw near to Him. It is in short apostasy, not from Christ's Person, but from the truth of Christ's work and from the reality of the Holy Spirit's presence Who constitutes all the saints now God's habitation and Christ's one body.

No doubt these subtle adversaries of the faith allege Exod. xix, 5 to oppose the dogmatic teaching of the N. T. But the argument is absolutely worthless. For the promise to Israel of being a kingdom of priests was strictly conditional on their obedience, as the law is and must be; whereas our priestly standing, like other privileges, hangs on Christ and His finished work to God's glory. The ritualist is what the apostle calls "fallen from grace," and much lower than the Galatians; he has lost the fundamental truth of Christianity, and is far more guilty than those who have never heard the Lord's name. The root principle, if not an anti-Christ, is anti-Christian.

It was a sad oversight that English Protestants allowed "priest" to represent "presbyter," and that the Reformed abroad called their ecclesiastical buildings "temples." An equivocal word is a compromise, of which error always takes advantage when the fresh power of truth fades. But if