

The Priesthood

The Priesthood and the Offerings

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The Changing of the Priesthood

One of the great, if not the greatest, of the several themes expounded in the Hebrews letter is that of the changing of the priesthood. This subject is of such great importance that because of it God, so we are told, also changed the law. Judged by any standards, this was a tremendous thing for God to do.

We see at once then, that to people of Hebrew extraction the changing of the priesthood was an act of unparalleled importance. Yet it was not an outrageous move on God's part, for viewed correctly it is seen to be a wonderful gesture made with a great sense of proportion. It was a move back into eternal truth and into the solid back-ground of Israel's origins, for God moved from the Mosaic to the Abrahamic faith position. A move which should endear itself to all hearts, for the change that God effected was from the Aaronic order of priesthood to that of Melchizedek.

Under the time-honoured Aaronic order, every-thing to do with the priesthood was outward. The Tabernacle, its multitude of sacrifices and offerings and its priests with their official robes and many duties were, by God's ordination, very ostentatious. True it was that by implication all these were of deep spiritual significance, and being commanded and instituted by God were legally necessary. None-the-less they were all outward in the flesh, as indeed were almost all things under the Old Covenant. However, it was God's stated desire and intention to bring in a new and everlasting Covenant, therefore it became an absolute necessity for Him to change the priesthood.

It seems that the Aaronic order instituted by Moses was but an adaptation of an original order which flourished and functioned from eternity under a king-priest called Melchizedek. It was heavenly, inward and spiritual, whereas the Aaronic order was earthly, outward and fleshly. The very nature, therefore, of the Aaronic or Old Covenant priesthood necessitated its removal. It could not remain, for it was not eternal, but could only be practised for an allowable period, so when God's full time came He changed it. This He accomplished by the miracle known as the incarnation, wherein He combined that which was invisible, inward and spiritual with the visible, outward and fleshly. 'Thou shalt call His name Jesus', He said.

From reading the Hebrews epistle it appears that although the secret was quite unknown to men during the days when He was manifest on the earth, Jesus was still the actual High Priest Melchizedek. The Son of God had eternally been and is and shall forever be the High Priest of a Heavenly spiritual ministry of which we at present know very little indeed. For this reason God caused this book to be written; it chiefly speaks of Him and His sacrifice and offering. In course of reading it we discover that even the Tabernacle itself had being and function, and was usable as a house by God only because it all spoke of and prefigured His Son. Beside this it was also the house of the priesthood; they lived and laboured in a (semi)-permanent public testimony of Jesus Christ, the Son of God called Melchizedek, the Man of flesh and blood and bones.

Consultation at this point with the actual Hebrew words used in commandment by God to Moses when the Tabernacle was ordered, may cause the student some surprise. Words which are usually associated with anthropology or biology are to be found liberally used in connection with the construction of God's dwelling-place. This was done in order to show us that in the ultimate God's intention was that He Himself should first become incarnate, and afterwards, as a result, forever live within human beings. That is why we are told in chapter 3 that 'Christ is a Son over His own house, which house are we'.

In connection with this we read in chapter 2 that God visited man in order to bring many sons unto glory. Here is a most important revelation, for in this the vital difference between the two priestly orders is at once pointedly revealed. Upon consulting Moses, we find that every priest of the Aaronic order could only be a member of that order by birth; each of the original priests was a son of Aaron. Eventually, however, as the priesthood continued, by reason of nature the priests unavoidably became more distantly related, both to him and to each other. Instead of being actual sons and brothers, they became cousins, grandsons, uncles etc. In process of time the close kinship faded almost entirely away into indefinite relationships, not easily traceable or recognizable. Although originally each priest was the direct immediate descendant of Aaron himself, within a few generations direct birth had given way to direct descent only.

How different it is with the order of Melchizedek; here all the sons 'are of one', God is their Father. In Christ's house, however, there are no tenuous links or faintly traceable relationships to God; each child given to Him by His Father for the priesthood is as directly born of God as He. Therefore, though not as great as He, by birth they are as much priests as He, and priesthood is their natural inheritance. He is the High Priest of our profession; the priesthood is shared, but He is incomparably greater than all.

The real gospel of this epistle is that, superior to Moses, who could not bring his people into the Promised Land, and Joshua who could not give them rest, and Aaron who could not bring his sons unto glory, our Jesus/Melchizedek can and does do all these things; He brings the many sons of God right into glory. He not only gives us the promise, but rest in it, and crowns all with glory. We see, therefore, both the weakness of the Aaronic order, and the reason why it was done away; it failed in the two vital points which constitute the Alpha and the Omega of priesthood, namely kinship and accomplishment. Sonship is the beginning and glory is the end of priestly ministry.

In Tabernacle days the actual abiding-place of God lay beyond the veil which separated the twin Tabernacles in the Holies of Holies. There God dwelt in Glory, His native element, but the sons of Aaron, the priests, were not allowed to enter there- in. In fact, upon the annual occasion when Aaron went in there, so far from entering with him, his sons had to remain outside the Tabernacle altogether. There was not to be any room for confusion left in anyone's mind about this; no-one but Aaron was allowed in the Holies of Holies or anywhere else in God's house at that time, not even within the entrance. But Jesus brings every one of God's sons through the veil right into His glory, for every priest who belongs to the order of Melchizedek must, indeed can only function in glory.

Herein lies the vast difference God wishes us to notice; not one of the Aaronic family functioned in that glory; to human flesh it is not only forbidden, but unbearable. Even Aaron himself only paid an annual fleeting visit to the Holies of Holies, entering in with holy fear, and coming swiftly out again with relief that he had not died. But his sons could not follow their father's example, they all had to live and practise without in a secondary place, in a lesser and artificial light.

The glory of the Holiest was supernatural, but the lamplight of the Holy Place was artificial, it was created from nature to speak of Christ. Therein lies one of the fundamental differences between the two orders; we who are of the order of Melchizedek are brought into the glory of the living God in Jesus the Christ within the veil of human flesh.

The Rending of the Veil

It is of major importance that we thoroughly understand the foregoing, for much mischief has been wrought among men because of failure to grasp the truth concerning which this epistle was written. It is commonly thought that as we sometimes sing, 'No more veil, God bids me enter by a new and living way', we are to understand that God has entirely removed that for which the veil stands. This is a quite mistaken interpretation of truth as we shall see. While it is true that the whole of the Old Testament symbolism is now destroyed, it must not be thought that that part of it which stood for the flesh of the Lord Jesus and what He accomplished therein and still accomplishes thereby is done away. To be explicit and to the point, it is peculiar that although we do not believe that Jesus is now, or can be throughout all eternity, any other than the Lamb of God, it is perilously and fatally easy to think that He is now no longer the Veil.

On the day God rent the Veil, which so effectually screened and blocked the way into the Holies of Holies where He lived on earth, He did not remove it, but left it hanging there, torn from top to bottom by His own hand. It was as if, to make His last gesture of mercy under the Old Covenant, He had risen from His seat of Mercy, rent the Veil, and removed Himself from earth to His eternal throne of grace in the heavens. It was His first great act in the era of grace too: there- by He announced the fact that all the symbolism He had formerly ordained for Israel was from that moment ended. He had, as it were, sat on His Mercy Seat, through the centuries, waiting for the last scene of the final act in the drama of Reconciliation to be concluded.

It had all commenced some thirty years earlier with the annunciation of the coming of His Son to earth. Since then it had passed through many episodes unto the final tragic act and glorious display of love. The last scene commenced with the first assault and infliction of indignities upon the body of His Son; from there it moved swiftly through successive scenes of increasing violence to the final curtain at Calvary,

with the Lord shouting out 'Finished' for all to hear. This accomplished, He immediately dismissed His spirit, commending it to His Father, offering Himself without spot to God by the Eternal Spirit.

At that moment long-awaited, this Man entered into the Holiest through His own flesh; He was the first human being to have done so. It was for this moment His Father God had been waiting; it was the closing moment of the last scene of the final act. Now eternal Redemption through the blood had been wrought and Reconciliation accomplished; God had received Man unto Himself, so He rent the veil and left Old Testament symbolism for ever. The rending of the Veil, not the removal of it, was the point to which God had been moving throughout all history.

The Jews gazed upon their rent veil without comprehension, not knowing what God had done; understandably they sewed it up again and continued their time-honoured self-deception. But it ill becomes us, who profess to be enlightened by the Spirit to attempt to remove the veil which God purposely left hanging there, lest we practise self-deception of a worse order than they. We who now are invited to enter the Holiest place must know what God has done; the way in is still through the veil; God rent it so that we may enter in through it.

We must see that if our blessed Melchizedek needed to go in that way, then a thousand times more is it necessary for us to enter thereby. Indeed the unmistakeable statement is that He inaugurated or consecrated this new and living way especially for us. He went in as the first of a long line of sons of which He is the Leader, and a great house of priests over which He is Chief. In this He was not as Aaron, who went in and out of the Holiest only as the first of a long line of High Priests who should succeed him in office following his demise.

Jesus went in first as the High Priest of the original order of Melchizedek over which He presides, and to which He gave His name, and all the priests who shall enter in through Him shall be with Him in the Holiest of all. Neither He nor they enter as Aaron, who went in round and under the drapes of the veil which dropped into position again upon his entrance and exit; Jesus our Melchizedek went in simultaneously with the rending of the veil which represented His own crucified flesh.

The rending of the veil meant that the twin, (though differently furnished) Tabernacles which housed the mysteries of God, had by God's own act become one. From that moment there was no more a second Holy place beyond the first Holy place, holier than the first and distinctively called the Holies of Holies, or the Holiest of all; both were the same. All was of one; 'both He that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one, for which cause He is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying, 'I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church I will sing praises unto thee'; what an accomplishment. Jesus of the cross and the throne is found singing in the midst of the church of the firstborn, who are His priestly brethren.

Only in one other place in the New Testament is it revealed that Jesus sang, and that is in the Upper Room with His chosen apostles as He prepared to leave for the cross. He sang then standing in the midst of the 'sanctified' disciples, now soon to be called His brethren, in anticipation of the events leading up to the day when He should stand in the midst of His brethren/Church singing in consummation of all. In the resurrection glory He would not sing alone, as if He were apart from the firstborn church of His brethren and fellow-priests, so the Tabernacle/Temple must be one. There may no longer be a compartment just for the elite Melchizedek and God, and another compartment for the lesser brethren, therefore the veil must be rent by our Melchizedek, that right through His flesh we all may come to God and be one with Him in glory.

Long ago Bishop Ray Palmer wrote a lovely hymn revealing his rare spiritual insight. With great perception in his opening lines he says,

'Jesus, these eyes have never seen that radiant form of Thine,

The veil of sense hangs dark between Thy blessed face and mine'.

He realized that although the veil of the Tabernacle is rent, there is still a veil, even as did the writer to the Hebrews when he penned such words as 'which hope we have as an anchor of the soul .. which entereth into that within the veil whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an High Priest for ever. after the order of Melchizedek'. So the bishop goes further, finishing his poem with these words, 'When death these mortal eyes shall seal, and still this throbbing heart, the rending veil shall Thee reveal, all glorious as Thou art'.

The veil of sense of which he speaks is the mortal flesh, the physical body which houses our being; by our five outward senses and our basic fleshly urges we cannot know God. When a person goes to Calvary to submit himself to the death of the cross, passing into God by Jesus' death, he only does so as a result of the veil being taken off his mind because with his whole heart he turned to God. But even so, while remaining here, he still abides in a tabernacle or earthly house. By the senses and powers of his outward man he still does not see the Lord, although inwardly, by reason of his inward senses and powers, he knows Him dwelling within. Through a spiritual experience of the death and resurrection of His Lord he has entered through the rent veil of Jesus' perfect flesh into the Holy places made without hands in the heavens. His soul is anchored in that which is within the veil, but physically he still dwells in his earthly tabernacle. This house, now entirely without a veil, serves him while he is awaiting the consummation, for in this respect Jesus is the perfect example of the true life of every man who is a priest of His order.

When the Lord rent the veil of the Tabernacle, He did it to show that the true dwelling-place of God is one and not two; singular not dual. If we would understand this we must firstly allow the outward tentage of the Tabernacle, standing within its own outer court, to symbolize the actual physical body of the Lord Jesus. Secondly we must see the semi-private Holy place as His soul, and thirdly the strictly private Holies of Holies as His entirely veiled spirit. If we do so, we have a complete symbolic picture of Him who was the secret of the Lord, the God/Man revealed upon earth. That is exactly as God wants us to understand it; for it is written that 'the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of an only begotten with a father, full of grace and truth.'

Moses' Tabernacle was built according to God's specification to be His temporary home; it was also the home of the law. It was a figure of the true and for its fulfilment it awaited the coming of God's Man, Jesus, of whom He said, 'this is my beloved son'. Full of grace, Jesus crowned and lifted the law into life, giving it a new grandeur, applying it in love to man's needs in a new way. At the same time He displayed truth or reality that is actual eternal life as opposed to symbolism or unreality. As to His physical frame, He was born of a virgin, a 'holy thing, called the Son of God, Jesus, Immanuel - God with us'; His outward manhood of flesh was the perfect court where God could meet man. As of old, within the outer court under one many-layered canopy stood the twin Tabernacles called the Holy place and the Holies of Holies, so also within His body of flesh abode the soul and spirit of the Man Christ Jesus.

The Holy place occupied one half of the tent and the Holies of Holies the other. They were parted only by a Veil hanging from ceiling to ground and stretching from side to side, completely filling the whole space. This served the dual purpose of forming the back of the first Tabernacle and the front of the second. Had it been necessary, the Holy place could have been effectively shut up by another Veil at the entrance, but this was seldom seen for it was kept tightly rolled up to the roof. God commanded this so that the sacred treasures within should be kept ever open to view, and seen to be constantly in use. This foreshadowed Jesus' life among men; His soul was immediately open to men, and always prepared for service.

Each of the pieces of furniture in the Holy place represented an important aspect and function of Jesus: as shown by the Table of Showbread He was the Bread of Life; as prefigured by the Lamp-stand, He was the Light of the World; as revealed by the Golden Censer standing before the Mercy Seat, spreading its fragrance all over the mystic veil, He was the precious, perfect perpetual sacrifice ascending to God among men as a glorious holy perfume. But Holy as He was, the Holiest of all lay hidden behind the thin Cherubic veil that screened His innermost spirit from sinners' hardened hearts. Everything Jesus of Nazareth did was by virtue of the spirit within Him, but no-one knew Him or that the Spirit within Him was God, and that He was God manifest in flesh.

His spirit, and therefore He Himself, was hidden from man while He was on earth. For that reason, even His disciples needed a revelation from His Father to make Him known to them: 'have I been so long time with you and yet hast thou not known me Philip?' He said. Through His bodily presence among them they recognized Him as a wonderful man, a most extraordinary soul, but they never recognized and knew His spirit, that is, who He really was.

The veil had always been on the uncomprehending minds of His disciples. Trying to find God, listening to Moses being read in their synagogues, they had been like blind persons struggling vainly to grope their way through two impenetrable veils, one on their own hearts and the other upon His spirit. Their hearts were veiled by sin, He was veiled in merciful grace. Although, by Him, we may now come to God, they could not come to God in Him. His spirit was veiled in flesh, their hearts were veiled, their minds were blinded, their spirits were dead; it was all so hopeless until He died. Then the veil was rent and the Lord made plain that the Holy place of His soul-state was exactly the same as the Holies of Holies of His spirit.

'In Him dwelleth all the fulness of the God- head bodily'; as were His soul and spirit, so also His body was the Holies of Holies, all was but one. God confirmed this by rending the inward spirit/soul veil simultaneously with the dismissal of Jesus' spirit from His body. With the dying of His body, the way was made immediately and permanently clear right through to the throne and glory of God. We may enter in with Him through the veil into the most Holy; brought into glory, cleared of all veils, and made one wholly integrated person, we must be offered by Melchizedek to His Father.

A Whole Burnt Offering

All of this enables us to see that if Jesus were still on earth He could not, indeed should not be a priest. In any case He did not even come of the priestly tribe - Levi. He was of the kingly tribe - Judah, He was a king-priest. He had no priestly ministry rights on earth, so He just had to go back to heaven in order to make the way for us and resume His heavenly ministry. He now appears there for us permanently; having offered Himself to God for us as our everlasting offering, He now as High Priest offers us to His Father as a continuous offering.

This being so, we by faith offer Him to our Father as our continuous offering - we are all of one. 'I and the children that God hath given me', is a phrase culled from His eternal concept of life, and so saying He stands in the midst of the Church, singing praises unto Father. With Him we must be as He a continual whole burnt offering ever ascending to God. This is why the living, powerful word of God, sharper than any two-edged sword, is introduced here, piercing and dividing asunder, discerning between soul and spirit, joints and marrow, detect-ing and analysing the thoughts and intents of the heart.

In the book of Leviticus, it is plain that under the Aaronic system, the whole burnt offering is given priority of position, for it is the first one to be mentioned. The law governing the offering demanded that it be slain, flayed, blooded, dissected, washed piece by piece, reassembled into completeness, placed upon the altar and there burnt wholly unto God. The dismembering was for purposes of inspection; it was cut absolutely wide open and then put together again to show us that we too must be naked and open before the eyes of God with whom we have to do, and as Jesus, be whole burnt offerings to God. Herein too we have a picture of the rending of the veil, for we also, as those animals, even as Melchizedek Himself, must be offered, spirit, soul and body, to God our Father. We are all of one; Jesus had to offer Himself without spot to God, and so must we, for in His offering He implied ours. 'He offered Himself without spot to God' for us. Oh, this Melchizedekian priesthood, what a wonderful ministry it is!

Some of its offerings were in part foreshadowed by the Aaronic offerings, particularly those which speak of the various spiritual states of the offerer. But all of the offerings made under the new order are far superior to those made under the old, for none of the Aaronic sacrifices and offerings ever reached God Himself. They only reached as far as the priesthood, that is why, even though they had temporary and partial meaning, they have been done away. Only the blood of the goat on the annual day of Atonement ever reached as far as God. Aaron took it in, and then, upon the discharge of his duty, speedily withdrew, That blood spoke of acceptance; it was a remembrance of all the sins of Israel, separated from them and sent right away; the actual goat offered, whose blood was accepted of God, was not the goat which was offered for sin. There was a complete dissociation from sin in the type.

Of the two goats which were supplied, one bore and bore away the sin, its whole body intact and its blood untapped, for it was an embodiment of sin: the other was offered to God for the people as being the embodiment of the perfections of the Christ, free from sin, The goat itself could not appear in the presence of God, for it had no personal human being; only its blood was sprinkled before Him there. God imputed unto it the privilege of representing Jesus, who alone could and should be made sin, bear it away through self-sacrifice and offer Himself, by His own blood, to God through His own flesh. This is the mystery of Redemption and Reconciliation unto Regeneration.

We see then that even under the limitations imposed by the Aaronic order, God was showing that the offerings, though intended for Him, were actually the priests'. It was they who received them and, having done so, offered them as though they were their own. They were commanded of God to retain parts of some of them for themselves, so that they, with God, 'partook of the altar'. Then again, at his installation into office, Aaron had first to offer for his own sins and then for the people's, but Melchizedek did not do that; He offered one sacrifice for sins forever and sat down. This, we are told, He did once (for all).

Jesus so identified Himself with the sins of His people, that in the act of death He spanned and joined widest extremes of sin and holiness, and sinner and God. He offered Himself to God in one and at once.

There was no repetition or distinction made, His offering was for Himself and us together as one. His identification with us as sinners was complete. What He did, He did as though He were the sinner, in fact the embodiment of all sinners; He demands no sin-sacrifice of us at all. However, He does expect us to offer ourselves, as Himself, without spot, as a whole and continuous burnt offering to God.

This is the high and holy calling and heavenly privilege of the priesthood according to Melchizedek. It has no function with regard to sin; it does not, because it cannot, sacrifice for sin. Every priest of this order is privileged and obliged to offer the sweet-savour offerings though. These are they that have no connection with sin at all, but are brought as voluntary gift-offerings to God in thankfulness and love.

A New and Holy Priesthood

The amazing statement in chapter 12.vv.22-24 is a wonderful synthesis of spiritual truth. It is a masterly example of the genius of God spanning and contracting all time. Selecting major points of special spiritual significance from the affairs of men, angels and God, the writer puts them together that we should see the wholeness of our great salvation, and seeing it not neglect it. This gem of revelation flows out from the giving of the law at Sinai about which he had been speaking, yet it is connected with Jerusalem and the kingdom. It omits the wilderness and by-passes the promised land; even the Tabernacle and Temple find no mention there. The blood of which it speaks is not the blood of animals but of the second man born on the earth, Abel; yet it refers to the General Assembly as though referring to the day of national gathering in ancient Israel at the feast of Atonement. But it is no such thing, he is neither looking backward nor forward, but upward and around. It is the Church of the firstborn, in general assembly, together with an innumerable company of angels.

Centuries after Abel was murdered, God interposed a period of atonement for His people. For this He used the inferior blood of animals, and ordered the whole system under the Aaronic priesthood; but we have not come to that, says the writer. Israel came to that. The Aaronic order was instituted for the blood of animals; it was integrated within it and functioned by it. But not so with the Melchizedekian priesthood; this eternal order functions in heaven in the presence of God. It is entirely spiritual; Jesus the Mediator of the New Covenant is both its Head and High Priest. We have come to the blood of sprinkling which speaks for us better things than the blood of Abel. Our Melchizedek did not just offer to God a more excellent sacrifice, He made the most excellent sacrifice of all.

Praise be to God, Jesus' offering and gift to God procured for us the kingdom and made entrance for us into the Heavenly Jerusalem and the Holies of Holies. To be sure then, seeing such vast changes have been made in so many realms, the priesthood must needs be changed also. But that would be quite an impossible task apart from changing the priests. The changing of the sacrifices and offerings, important as that is, could not change the priesthood. Moreover, since it was found necessary to change the High Priest, it is absolutely vital that the priests be changed.

The teaching derived from the ceremony of the ordination and installation of men into the Aaronic priesthood, is that the priest had to be thoroughly changed. Before he was allowed to enter God's Tabernacle service or touch the sacrifices, offerings and gifts of the people, he had to be fully qualified. This being so, it must also be true that the law is changed, for except that be changed, there can be no change in the priests.

God, therefore, according to His purpose, has permanently changed the law; this He has done in three respects, namely in its presence, its power and its purpose. By doing so, He has changed the priests, in preparation for their eternal priesthood. This is effected in them by changing: (1) the presence or place of the law from lying inanimate within the ark to its new personal and permanent position - within the priests; (2) the power of the law from regularizing and controlling the life by commandment from without, to being a life-giving principle within, enabling and inspiring all thought motive and action; (3) as a result of this, the purpose of the law from revealing and penalizing sin to eliminating it from daily practice.

Acceptable Spiritual Sacrifices

This is that New Covenant which is spoken of in chapter 8. It is the basic perfection which constitutes a man a son and a priest of God, able to enter into the all-Holiest and function there. When this is accomplished, the law is changed from being an outward observation to an inward inspiration. It then

becomes basically the law of being and not primarily the law of doing; by this means nature and personality are so changed that a person is fundamentally fitted to be in the presence of God and bear the glory.

This being so, the priest also becomes a whole burnt offering to God. Already the sharp, powerful, sword-like word has divided, pierced and discerned his entire being; he is naked and open before the eyes of God. His offering is the whole self sacrificed to God in the everyday, an entirely spiritual sacrifice. As he lives among men, he finds every condition and opportunity he needs at all times to die to self that Christ may be manifest in his life everywhere; this is that which God desires, And all this is possible because, in exactly the same way as the High Priest, the priest has also entered into the Holies of Holies: (1) he is brought there as a son, (2) he enters there as a priest, (3) he is offered there as a sacrifice to God.

Peter, in his first epistle, is really taken up with this same theme. Like the writer to the Hebrews he is writing to a persecuted people, the true children of God, strangers and pilgrims on the earth. They are the chosen generation, the royal priesthood, the peculiar people who show forth the virtues of Christ to man and God. These are a spiritual house, chosen to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God, but only by Jesus Christ. Whatever the sacrifice, always it is He who supervises and lastly handles it, offering it to God for us. The priests hand over to the High Priest and He, our Melchizedek, presents the sacrificial offerings to God.

As it was with Him, so also it is with us, the offering and the offerer are one. Whatever sacrifice is offered by the priest, it is accepted as being an expression of the offerer and is identified with that person. The Man Jesus, His life, (that is His standard of self-conduct in daily behaviour when among men) is the only acceptable sacrifice there; all must be in accord with that. Being accepted by Him, He presents it to the Father.

That is why Peter is so clear and emphatic about our manner of behaviour among men. Suffer we must, he says; be tempted we must; be persecuted we must, for only by these things is it possible to show forth His godly human virtues. We must live in humility, take buffeting patiently, walk in His footsteps, be meek and quiet in spirit, allow our righteousness to appear wrong to others, go through the fiery trial for only as we do so have we any- thing acceptable to offer to God. To be able to sacrifice oneself spiritually to God requires a person to relinquish all claims to recognition, or be given justice; priests must suffer quite undeservedly and wrongfully; in other words be lambs without blemish or spot.

In the Holiest of All

This is the standard in the Holiest of all where the priests must all live and function in order to offer and minister the spiritual sacrifices that God is expecting of us. It is quite clear then why we all must enter in through His flesh via the rent veil by His blood in the same manner as the High Priest Himself. No man could possibly live this life unless he has been crucified, dead, buried and raised up with Him to live crucified unto sin and self and the world and the devil. As the apostle says, we must be holy on this earth now as He was holy Himself among men on earth; God has not got a double standard, it is the same for us as for Him. This is the only life it is at all possible to live in the Holies of Holies, where all New Testament priests must function. It cannot be overstressed that it is the same life we live among men on earth that has to be lived there, for it is impossible to live any other.

It is fallacious to think that we can live a dual life, one when we come together in church and another when we are out among men. It is also erroneous to believe that the priesthood only functions when we sing hymns, give prophecies, or join in corporate worship. Not once did Jesus, our great High Priest, go to synagogue or temple to make any offering. He sacrificed and offered Himself to God constantly, out in the everyday world of men's needs and demands, while He endured persecutions, denials, insults and blasphemies. Finally, broken- hearted, He offered Himself without spot to God by the Eternal Spirit, outside the city wall among the thieves, the butchers, the cowards, torturers, brutes, where the lepers might normally have been found, except this special, official murder was taking place.

With Jesus everywhere was as the Holies of Holies; He turned all into holiness; nothing, not even sin, defiled Him. This is how it must be with us also. He has left us an example that we should follow in His steps, who did not sin, neither was guile found in His mouth, who when He was reviled, reviled not again. If we follow His example, our lives shall be turned into offerings acceptable to Him.

No priest other than Jesus can make sacrifice and offering for sin - neither his own or anyone else's - that privilege belonged to the High Priest alone. But having benefit of the unique offering He made through

death, we also have opportunity and are granted the privilege of living sinless and spotless lives without blemish unto God before men, as He did for and before us on this earth. God is expecting this kind of daily sacrifice from us, not particularly heroic deeds. Martyrdom may become our final lot, but unless it crowns a life of daily sacrifice its value to us is lost. The act of giving a body to be burned is either profitable or else profitless according to the spirit in which it is done. The sacrifice of the mortal, physical frame is not the acceptable offering, but the spirit that yields up the new self. Moment by moment, through Christ it may be presented to God, and Jesus represented to men; this is the spiritual sacrifice.

A man's new life offered to God is the sacrifice, whether it be endured or enjoyed. It must be entirely spiritual, for God is no more worshipped by man's hands than He dwells in temples made with hands. To borrow an idea from Wesley, death by any means should seal God's endless mercies and make the sacrifice complete. This then is the greatest task of our lives so spiritual sacrifices are the most difficult for the natural man to make because they are so unnoticed. Men ignore them, yet they are the most important and precious.

Melchizedek, the great High Priest Himself, is the one who shows the rest of the priests the way to make spiritual sacrifices as they ought. Right at the beginning of His earthly ministry He created wine from water in one marvellous stroke. For that He ought to have received all credit, instead of which He received none, but had to stand by and see another take the credit and receive the praise; and He did so without saying a word. He did not think it a great sacrifice, nor is it recorded by John in this vein; greater tests than this were laid up in store for Him; all He did was offer Himself spiritually to God. All forecast Calvary.

The Fiery Trial

This is why Peter introduces into his epistle the element of fire. Faith 'tried by fire': 'the fiery trial which is to try you' is not to be counted strange, he said. How can sacrifice be offered except by fire? On the day of His death had not the Lord Jesus been rescued and laid in a tomb by those who respected Him and honoured His memory, His body would have been cast into the fires of the valley of the son of Hinnom. Of course this was no altar of sacrifice, it was the public incinerator where all the rubbish and unwanted material was burned; there, blasphemously, they would have burned His body as refuse, but God overruled them, for He had arranged otherwise. He had planned that the body should burn, but not that physical body and not those fires.

Except in the case of the cleansing of the leper, all Old Testament sacrifices had to be made by fire unto God. The bodies of those beasts whose blood was brought into the sanctuary by the High Priest for sin had to be 'burned without the camp' we are told. 'Wherefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered without the gate'. But praise the Lord, His body was not burned outside the city wall. However, what was laid down as proper procedure or law governing the sacrifices, had to be fulfilled in relationship to Christ's sacrifice. So in order to complete the truth as prefigured in type under the Old Covenant, the Lord's body should have been consumed by fire, but the fires of the local Gehenna were not the fires the Lord could accept. He therefore ratified and established the truth by fulfilling the type in another way.

It was all fulfilled on the day of Pentecost when He baptized men and women in the Holy Spirit, forming them into the Church which is His body. Then the cloven tongues as of fire were in evidence sitting upon each of those who had foregathered in the upper room to await the promise. The fire came from heaven; God revealed that His body is burning there in fire. The natural physical fires would only have destroyed His natural body and consumed His mortal flesh, but spirit bodies require spiritual fire.

He knew that His Father would not suffer His Holy One to see corruption, or allow His flesh to come to destruction, else how could He possibly have been Melchizedek the faithful and merciful High Priest? He also knew that to be accepted on High, His Body must be forever an offering made by fire, the Church cannot be wholly acceptable unto God apart from fire. Only the mighty fiery baptism in the Spirit can complete the figure according to the type; the Body which was formed in the fire can only exist in fire - it must be a continual burnt offering to God.

We must all understand that the fires of trials heaped upon our souls are not the same as the spiritual fire which consumes us in love and devotion to the Lord. The latter is permanent, the former is only intermittent, though whenever it comes it burns at the same time as the former, it must not be mistaken for it. It is not the fire of trial, but how I react in it, that matters; does the fire of the Spirit so consume me for

God, that all which would react badly has been burned from me? If so, the outward fires do but co-operate unto my refining.

It is whether I respond to the burning fire in anger with antagonism, self-vindication and self-justification, or retaliate with vehement denials seeking to save my reputation; or going to the other extreme, I sink into self-pity, fading into weakness, -setting my will to try no more, hiding behind the worldly wisdom of 'once bitten twice shy', seeking consolation and pity and cries of 'injustice' and 'shame'. Or whether on the other hand I take joyfully the spoiling of my goods, and with patience the buffeting of my person, or the reviling of my name: whether I count all things but dung anyway, and have already in heart if not in goods, suffered the loss of all things; whether I can turn the other cheek, go the second mile, love them that hate me, and pray for them that despitefully use me: in other words it all depends on whether I am offered to self or God and whether I sacrifice to self or the Lord.

The priest, like the High Priest before him, must have somewhat to offer; as there is only one life acceptable in heaven, it must be the New Man, with all His graces and glories and virtues. This is what is intended to be understood by the phrase 'the sacrifice of praise'. God is praised if and when we go through extended periods of testing and tribulation rejoicingly; when we can thank Him for everything, even the bitterest cup; praise Him in prison, and glory in the things which make us infirm; when the greatest waves but prove our buoyancy and when nothing can harm us, even though it hurt us deeply. To praise Him when it is absolutely unnatural to do so is sacrifice, rare, precious. But then, as Peter says, to us which believe He is precious (is the preciousness) this is our own personal appreciation of Him. It is this preciousness which each person offers to God - Him in all His preciousness to our souls.