

The Priesthood

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One of the most important things the Bible tells us about God's great work in saving sinful man is that God arranges to help the sinner come to God. It is like a free medical service where there is not only a fully equipped hospital with a competent staff of skilled doctors to which the poor can come at no cost, but an ambulance service with capable attendants is provided to bring any to the hospital who might not otherwise come. This ambulance service is called the *priesthood*. God has planned that persons who know what to do should be on hand to help the poor, needy soul who might stay away because of ignorance or weakness. Let us examine the whole operation of bringing sinners to God that they may be saved.

THE TABERNACLE

In the Old Testament just after Israel came out of Egypt and while they were traveling across the desert, the place of worship was called the *tabernacle*. There the people could meet God face to face as a man talks with his friend. Later in Israel's history the place of worship was named the *temple*. The tabernacle and the temple were very real factors in the spiritual life of the people.

The word *tabernacle* is still in use today. With us it generally suggests a temporary structure open on the sides, without walls - a pavilion. The tabernacle in Israel's history was a temporary structure. It looked like a tent, but it was built carefully according to a given plan. Every detail in it had much significance because it showed the people of Israel how they should approach God in worship.

Israel was organized into twelve tribes. The tabernacle was placed in the very center of the camp with the tribes surrounding it, three tribes to the north, three tribes to the east, three tribes to the south, and three tribes to the west. It was placed in the center of the camp to impress the people with the fact that God was in their midst. They were to realize they could meet God in the tabernacle.

During the forty days which Moses spent on Mt. Sinai, he received the Ten Commandments from God. God also revealed to him the blueprint for the tabernacle and its furnishings. Every aspect of the tabernacle's construction was specifically described, and every detail of the furniture's construction and arrangement was precisely stated. Everything had special meaning; even the arrangement of the various furnishings was significant.

The tent building itself was rectangular, it was closed on three sides and open at one end. The interior of the tabernacle was divided into two parts. The part that was by the open wall and which would be entered first was called "the Holy place." A dividing curtain, commonly called the veil, separated this front part from the closed room at the rear. The room farthest away from the door was called "the Holy of Holies." Sometimes it was called "the Holiest of All." The Ark of the Covenant was kept in the Holy of Holies. This Ark was a rectangular box which looked like a chest, on which were the golden Cherubim. This was called the mercy seat, where the presence of God would be.

Outside the tabernacle, in the yard, was an altar - the place where the animal sacrifices were slain. The worshipper would bring his sacrifice to the altar. He would put his hands on the lamb and confess his sins to signify that his sins were being put on this innocent substitute. The priest would then take the lamb and slay it. At that point the worshipper experienced forgiveness, because when the lamb died in his place, he would not have to die and God would forgive him his sins. That was the first step toward God. In our day and time, the first step toward God is to confess our sins and to believe in the Lord

Jesus Christ, who died for our sins. That the blood of Christ is shed on behalf of sin is the first thing a person must realize as he comes to God.

Moving from the altar, the priest, representing the penitent worshipper, came to a rather strange object. It looked like a big tub filled with water and set on a stand. This was the *laver*. Here the priest was washed. He was being ceremonially cleansed.

All this shows how the sinner, represented by the priest, was forgiven and cleansed. From this point the priest entered the Holy place. Immediately through the entrance on the left and on the right, there were two articles of furniture. The one on the left was a seven-branched *candlestick* with light shining forth. This symbolizes *understanding*. This would signify that when man comes into the presence of God, forgiven and cleansed, he receives knowledge of the grace of God.

On the right side of the Holy place was a table called the table of *shewbread*. During the days when the children of Israel were in the desert, a pot of manna was placed on the table. The manna was later replaced by bread. The manna was a symbol of nourishment and strength. It signified that God would feed His people. Today it is the man who feeds on the manna of the Word of God who is nourished and is strong in faith.

Proceeding on in the Holy place, the priest came to a small *altar of incense*. It was located in front of the *veil*, the curtain that separated the interior of the tabernacle into its two rooms. On this altar was an incense burner with perfume burning all the time. It pictured, in Israel's experience, "a sacrifice of sweet smelling savour" to God, the prayers of the saints offering praise and thanksgiving to God. This plan of the tabernacle shows that man does not praise and thank God until he has been forgiven, cleansed, understands the ways of God, and is strong in faith.

Behind the altar of incense was the veil, and beyond this the priest generally was not permitted to go. Only once a year did the high priest go through the veil into the presence of God. This was the innermost part of the tabernacle, the place called the *Holy of Holies*. The Ark of the Covenant was located here. There were three things in the Ark. There were the tablets of stone which Moses brought down from Mt. Sinai, Aaron's rod that budded, and some manna from the wilderness. The most important thing it contained was the law. The top of the Ark, between the Cherubim, was the mercy seat. It was there that God would meet with His people face to face on the Day of Atonement.

After Israel settled in the land of Canaan, they no longer traveled about from place to place or lived in tents. They began to build their houses of stone. It was at this time that their place of worship was changed from *tabernacle* to *temple*. The only difference between the temple and the tabernacle was that the temple was a permanent structure. Solomon built the temple of stone and of cedar, a glorious permanent building but built exactly after the pattern of the tabernacle. It had the same purpose, to show the people that God was in their midst and to guide them in their worship of Him. The sinner confessed his sin; he experienced forgiveness; he received light of the knowledge of the glory of God; he was made strong in faith; he gave thanks to God; he came into His presence and God talked with him face to face, as a man speaks with his friend. That was the route mapped out by God and traveled by the children of Israel. This map has not changed. It is the route to be traveled by men today.

CLEANSSED BY THE BLOOD

We read in the Bible that sin is taken away by the shedding of blood. What is meant by the phrase *cleansed by the blood*?

Sin not only separates, alienates, and isolates a person from God; it also defiles the soul. When I sin,

something happens that corrupts my mind and ruins me. A much simpler way to describe it would be to say that sin is the dry rot of the soul. Guilt affects the soul as rust affects metal. If a man's sins remain with him, they will eat his heart out.

God arranges to cleanse the soul from sin. When a penitent soul confesses his sin, God cancels the sin, forgives the sinner and washes him clean. This is a remarkable truth. *Cleansed by the blood* means washed clean because Jesus Christ died for sinful man on Calvary's cross, Every time the term *the blood* is spoken, it brings to the Christian's mind the death of Christ on the cross. To say that I am *cleansed by the blood* means that the defiling effects of sin are removed from my heart when I accept Christ's death for myself. This brings to mind the wonderful kindness of God in the old saying, "The light that reveals is the light that heals." Just as surely as I become aware of my sin and confess my sin, God begins to heal and take my sin away.

Unconfessed sin somehow sticks to a man. If a man is not conscious that God has forgiven his sins, if he does not understand and believe that Christ, in dying on Calvary's cross, bore his sins in His own body so that his sin is now on Him, that man's sin sticks to him. It is like soot. The more it is rubbed, the more it spreads. It cannot be gotten rid of. To be completely removed, sin must be confessed, and man must believe that God has accepted Jesus Christ's death on his behalf. In the death of Christ, through God's remarkable spiritual chemistry, sin is dissolved. It is gone. The blood of the Lord Jesus Christ not only takes away the sin but also the memory of it. We read of the Lord Jesus Christ: "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood" (Rev. 1:5). In the words of the old gospel hymn:

There is pow'r, pow'r,
Wonder-working pow'r
In the blood of the Lamb;
There is pow'r, pow'r,
Wonder-working pow'r
In the precious blood of the Lamb.

It is difficult to describe the process, but the results are real. After confession has been made and forgiveness is received, cleansing follows. The death of Christ accomplishes these wonderful results.

Hebrews 9:14 states, "How much more shall the blood of Christ, . . . purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" It seems that when a man has done something he should not have done and knows that he has sinned, the consciousness of his wrongdoing lingers with him. As long as he is careless and indifferent about spiritual matters, this does not seem to bother him; but when he has become sensitive to spiritual things and thinks in terms of God in heaven, the memory of his sin besets him and haunts him. As long as such things are on his conscience, they defile and hold the man back, hindering him from serving God.

The world cannot understand why Christian people are not always depressed about their sin. Worldly people do not care one way or the other about sin; and so they have no reason to become depressed. Christians, however, care about their sin, because they know they have displeased God. If this is true, why are not Christians in a constant state of depression? The thing that the worldly person does not seem to grasp is the fact that God forgives and cleanses sin that has been confessed.

There are some Christians who, for one reason or another, actually think there is a virtue in thinking about and dwelling upon their sin. This type of introspection is not wholesome and has no basis in

Biblical teaching. There are some professing Christians who spend a great deal of time lamenting the fact that they are not as good as they should be. Under the cloak of humility they speak of all of the things they have done wrong. This kind of confession not only detracts from the person's testimony but is dishonoring to God. God says, "I will remember their sin no more" (Jer. 31:34). If God has forgiven and forgotten our sins, why should we continue to be exercised over them? Why not believe that Jesus Christ died for them and that Almighty God has forgiven them, and give Christ the glory? This is truly humbling, but it gives release. The person who knows there is nothing against him is the person who can spend his time in thinking about what he can do to please God.

Let me use a personal illustration. When I first became a Christian, an old farmer who was a neighbor heard that I had been converted. In the community in which I grew up, this was a rather unusual event. This neighbor asked me, "Do you think you are going to go to heaven?" I replied, "Yes." "Are you sure you are going to go to heaven?" Again I said, "Yes." He said, "You must think you are pretty good." That had never entered my mind, but it came to me to tell him, "No, I am not good, but my Lord is good, and He is the One who is going to take me to heaven." The old man began to think. He said, "You mean to tell me that you think that when you get to heaven you are not going to have to pay for the things you have done wrong?" To this I replied, "That is exactly what I mean to tell you. I am not going to pay for what I have done wrong." He thought about it a bit further and asked, "You think you are going to get off free?" "Yes, I think I am going to get off free." He could not understand how I could be so sure of myself. It was simply a matter of taking God at His word. He had the idea that I should wear crepe on my sleeve because of all the wrong I had done. Actually if I should wear crepe all my days, I would never be able to feel sorry enough for the wrong I have done. But this is not the way it is done. Salvation is a matter of accepting what God has done for me through Christ He has taken my sins away, and I am completely and absolutely free.

Children would understand the term "I am home-free," and some people would understand "I am scot-free." This point bears emphasizing, for when man is conscious of being free, his spirit is filled with gratitude; and he wants to do right in the sight of God. The person who is really forgiven wants to do right. He hates the sins that once hurt the Lord Jesus Christ. He has been forgiven and his sins no longer defile his memory. He has been *cleansed by the blood*.

CONSECRATION

The words *consecrate* and *consecration* are used over and over in the Old Testament. The definition of *consecrate* is "to set apart for a sacred purpose." *Consecration*, being the noun, means *dedication* and *devotion* to God.

Consecration is used in referring to a Christian's service to God. How can a man serve God? I cannot make God rich with my money. I cannot do His work with my hands. The one thing my human heart can do toward God is to honor and reverence Him. To honor God is to esteem Him and lift Him up above everything else in life. The attitude of my heart and mind should be that there is nothing to compare with God.

A common way to honor a person is to set things aside especially for him. When a guest is visiting us, we make a room ready for him, and the children are told to stay out of that room. It is set aside for that person. The same thing is done when a family wants to honor the father in the home. He is given a special chair in which to sit, and the children are not supposed to sit in that chair. That one chair is for the father and no one else.

With reference to God, certain things may be said to be *sacred* and certain things said to be *common*. Things are not sacred in themselves. They are *made* sacred by setting them aside for a special use. In this way a room can be made a sacred room. All the other rooms in the building can be used for various things, but this one room is saved for a particular purpose. A book can be made a sacred book and as a sacred book it is not used like an ordinary book. It is kept for a special purpose. For many people, the Bible is a sacred book. The church sanctuary is a sacred room. The pulpit is a sacred place. All these have been set aside specially for a particular purpose. When anything has been designated to be used for a specific, holy purpose, it is then a sacred thing. The process of making anything sacred is *consecration*.

In the Old Testament there was a certain procedure to be followed in consecrating the priest. This can be of significance to us. It is described in Exodus 29. Certain persons were chosen out of the tribe of Levi and were then consecrated to the office of priest. From that time on, they were to devote themselves entirely to this office and were to be considered as sacred to God. They were not to be available for anything else.

The consecration of the priests followed a very definite order. First there was the act of *washing* their sin away. They were to be clean. This remains true today. If any man is going to come into the presence of God as a servant to be consecrated to Him, then those things that are not acceptable to God must be washed away.

Secondly, attention was given to the way the priests were dressed. They were to wear *prepared garments* in the service to which they were called. A prescribed uniform, with every part especially set aside for this one service, was given to them. The idea was that God outfits His servants to come into His presence. This is still the way God does today.

The third step was the *anointing*. Anointing with oil in the Old Testament meant that the grace of God was being given. God gives His grace to help His servants in their work. In the New Testament this *anointing* is done in the giving of the Holy Spirit. Throughout the Bible we learn that God gives His people special grace to do what He wants them to do. So if God calls a man to be king, this man is anointed, given special grace for this task. If God calls a man to be the commander of an army, He will give to that man the special understanding and skill he needs to be a successful commander of an army.

Thus the priests were washed and clothed and anointed with power from on high in order that they might serve the Lord. But as we read on we see it was arranged that there should be a *sin offering* made for them. This means that even though they were consecrated they were still imperfect. Although they were fully committed to serve the Lord there was still something lacking. There would still be sin in their lives, and they needed to be forgiven even as they served God.

A second offering was also described. This was a *burnt offering*. The difference between the sin offering and the burnt offering was that in the sin offering the blood was taken in and sprinkled before God, showing that an innocent creature had died on behalf of sin, but in the burnt offering the whole body of the slain animal was brought into the presence of God and there was totally consumed by fire. This was to show complete, total yieldedness to God and utter obedience to Him. This ceremony showed that the priest was to be sincerely obedient to God.

The final step in the procedure was that they were *marked with blood* on the tip of the right ear, on the thumb of the right hand, and on the great toe of the right foot. This shows a very important truth about anybody who serves God even today. Marked with blood on the ear, a man would listen to God because Christ died for him. Marked with blood on the hand, he would work for God because Christ died for him. Marked with blood on the toe of the right foot, he would walk with God because Christ died for him. Listening with the ear, doing with the hand, going with the feet - everything done because Christ

died for him. This was the ceremony of consecration of the priests showing that they were to be used in a very special way in serving the Lord.

BEING SANCTIFIED

To fully understand what the Bible means by being *saved*, it is important to know what is the meaning of being *sanctified*. But to know what being *sanctified* means, it is necessary to consider several other things.

One thing the Bible makes clear is that there is a *difference between God and the world* He created. The Bible emphasizes that man should pay more attention to God than to the things He has created. Man should be more concerned about the needs of his soul than the needs of his body. "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4). Man does live by bread, it is true, but not by bread only, because there is more to man than his body. "Every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" speaks for the soul. Jesus, on another occasion, stressing the difference between the soul and the body, said, "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Matt. 16:26). The world is one thing, but the soul and its relationship with God is something else and much more important.

Jesus gave further emphasis to this thought when He taught, "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon" (Matt. 6:24).

Another Biblical idea which helps us understand sanctification is that *love demands exclusive affection*. When a man is said to be in love, it is taken to mean that he gives his full affection to the loved one. This is what is cherished in the Christian concept of marriage. This love and affection involves complete commitment. God calls upon man to love Him with whole-hearted devotion. He will accept nothing less than this.

When God tells His people that He wants them to be sanctified, he means for them to make a distinction between Himself and the rest of the world. He also wants them to commit themselves to Him in exclusiveness. They are to worship Him and Him alone. They are to serve Him with a devotion that is full and complete.

Many readers of the Bible have been disturbed by the description of God as One who is jealous. "For the Lord thy God is a jealous God" (Deut. 6:15). They have a concept that jealousy is an evil and selfish thing. Jealousy can have the meaning of suspicion, but it can also have the meaning of watchfulness. The Bible uses jealousy as it relates to God in the sense that He watches over us carefully. As the Maker and Keeper of the world, God wants men to worship and love Him rather than any thing and He will be satisfied with nothing less.

This demand for exclusive affection can be seen in many places. Husband and wife are to belong to each other and no one else. Children and parents belong only to each other. God wants His people to realize they belong to Him in a way that they do not belong to anyone else on the face of the earth. They are to esteem and love Him above all others. They are to be set apart in a special way as wholly committed to Him. This is what being *sanctified* means.

A common notion is to think being *sanctified* has something to do with morality or ethics, that a person who is sanctified is a person with a very superior morality or a person of unusual spiritual attainment. Unusual spiritual attainment and superior morality are good, but this is not the meaning of being *sanctified*. The concept of sanctification cannot be understood apart from the idea that the person

or thing sanctified has been especially set apart by God. The tabernacle was a sanctified place. Vessels and furniture were sanctified. The Sabbath was sanctified. The basic idea in the Bible is that things set aside for a particular purpose are "sanctified." When a person is set aside for God, his morality will improve, his ethics will be good, and he will grow in spiritual attainment. This is the result of being sanctified, but it is not what being sanctified means.

All this is illustrated for me in something that I noticed as a boy at home. I grew up in a small country town and an important place in that town was the railway station. Passenger trains went through twice a day. One went east and the other went west. This was an event in a small town, and it was an exciting thing to be at the railway station when the train went through. The long platform on the railroad station was made of wood and the railroad station was also made of wood. The town was too small to have a fire department, and its only water supply was the town well. If there ever was a fire, it was a matter of carrying the water from the well to the fire or at best stretching a long fire hose from the well to whatever place in the town was burning. Usually, the water reached the place a long time after the fire was over, but that was the fire protection we had. The railway station did not want to be dependent upon the Volunteer Fire Department; therefore, they had their own arrangement. On the station wall was a glass case filled with tools and underneath were the words *for fire only*. Those tools were not to be used for anything else. The expression *for fire only* actually meant *sanctified for fire*. They were set apart for that use. Big barrels of water were placed on the platform and beside each barrel was a pail painted red with white letters, F I R E, on it. The pails were not tied down; they were just sitting there. They were the kind of pail every farmer used in connection with his daily work, but no one ever took those pails. Everyone understood that they were *for fire only*. They were "sanctified" pails, set aside for a particular purpose.

When the Lord said, "Sanctify yourselves" (Lev. 20:7), He meant "Put away other things, leave off everything else, and commit yourself only to God." When persons are set apart for God, the basic principle involved is love. They are committed entirely, permanently, to God in love. They are sanctified unto Him, and they are the people the Bible calls *saints*. The root of the word *saint* and the root of the word *sanctify* is the same root. The *sanctified ones* are the *saints*. The word *saint* does not refer to spiritual achievement as many suppose. It does not refer to people who have lived a lifetime of unusually good behavior. This may be the case, but it is not why they are called saints. They are saints because they are set apart to God in a special way. The marvelous thing about the Gospel is that everyday, workaday people can become "saints" of God.

When God says to people, "Sanctify yourselves," and demands that they be sanctified to Him, the way this is done is for each individual to commit himself to God. The person who commits himself to the Lord will undoubtedly grow in spiritual things. Certainly moral virtue and spiritual piety will grow when a man faces God again and again as the Supreme One in his heart. Remember, these are the results of being sanctified and not the way in which a man becomes sanctified. A man can be described as sanctified when he has chosen God rather than His creation, and has given his heart in loving devotion to Him. A work of grace has taken place and the man has come to the realization that there are all kinds of things in the world, but none of them are equal to God. This is the person to whom God will commit Himself and with whom He will be pleased.

BEING HOLY

The English word *holy* can best be understood if the spelling is changed to *wholly*. Holy means "*wholly*

given over to God." We have just seen that *sanctification* is the process by which one becomes *holy*. A man must be genuinely and sincerely committed to God with all his being if he would become holy.

People are likely to think that the word *holy* refers only to persons who are very good. Upon seeing someone whose spiritual faithfulness to God is steadfast, people are inclined to say, "Oh, my, but that is a holy person." This may be true, but the fact that such a man is good is not the cause of his holiness. Holiness in any man is to be seen in the completeness of his committal to God and the singleness of mind with which he is devoted to God. "Be ye holy" is best understood as a call to being altogether committed to God. One becomes holy when his greatest aim and purpose in life is to worship and serve God.

When the Bible says, "Be ye holy," it does not mean a long-drawn-out process that takes years to do. When the Lord says, "Ye shall be holy for I . . . am holy," this is something that a man can do at once. Those words were first spoken to the children of Israel while they were in the desert. It was as if they had been told, "Be holy right now, because it can be done."

If becoming holy meant I had to live a good life for thirty years so that I could be holy, I could take my time. But the Biblical concept of holiness does not permit delay. You can become holy now. "Today is the day if you will hear His voice."

If one must live an earnest, serious-minded spiritual life for a long period of time before he could be blessed, only the person who lives to a ripe old age could be assured of blessing or of holiness. If this were true, man would be saved by works and not by the grace of God. But holiness is available to any man, even a man with a sin-stained life, when that person turns in penitent faith to the Lord and becomes *wholly* committed to Him.

Many a person has thought that it would be necessary to get himself cleaned up and have everything right before he could begin to live a holy life. If I were to wait until then, I would never get it done. I must come to God first, and let Him take an active part in the cleaning-up process, and He will do it right after my commitment has been made.

When the Bible says, "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14), it is not condemning to eternal damnation all people who die before they have obtained spiritual perfection. It is saying that without holiness it is impossible to have the full joy and blessing of the presence of the Lord. If the heart of a man is cool toward Him, God will not reveal Himself in all His fullness. But if the heart is completely yielded to Him, He will come to that man. "A broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise" (Ps. 51:17). "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock; if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me" (Rev. 3:20). Biblical holiness is available to all who will receive the pardon offered in Christ Jesus, the sooner the better.

When one dedicates himself to God, it means he gives himself over to do the will of God. This is the basic idea in holiness. A person who has dedicated himself is one that the Bible would speak of as being holy. Holiness is related to sanctification in so far as the person has been "set apart unto the Lord." As he dedicates himself to serving the Lord, his state and condition is that of "being holy unto God."

The Sabbath is spoken of as a holy Sabbath. It is a day on which God alone is to be served. It is proper to speak of the sanctuary of a church as a holy place. The word *sanctuary* comes from the verb *sanctify*, which means "to set apart." When an auditorium is set apart only for the worship of God, it is commonly called a sanctuary. It is a holy place. When a new organ is installed in a church, it is customary to have a ceremony of dedication. The same organ could have been put in a theater, but it is now put in the church. The significance of the ceremony of dedication is to say that this particular

instrument will be used exclusively for playing music in the worship of God. In that sense it is a dedicated, sanctified organ, because it is to be used only for the service of God. This could then be called a "holy" organ.

Every Christian should desire to be one who is dedicated and committed to the cause of Christ in such a way that the term *holy* applies to him. Whenever a believer commits himself to serve God with all he is and has, he is properly called *holy*.

THE ATONEMENT

The word *atonement* is very seldom used in everyday speech. It is a Bible word. In Chapter Three as we discussed the "sin offering" we noted that there is no Greek or Latin root for the English verb *atone*. The word *atone* was originally a phrase, the very same letters in two words, *at-one*. The atonement is the *at-onement*. When Christ Jesus atoned, He *at-oned*. The atoning work of Christ is the *at-oneing* work. Christ brought sinful man, estranged and separated from God, back to be *at-one* with God.

The Scriptures teach that sin separates man from God. In fact, because of sin man was alienated from God. The word *alienate* is based on the noun *alien*. An alien is a foreigner, in a sense an enemy, someone to suspect. To take human beings who were the creatures of God, made by His hand in His own image, and to turn them into aliens, strangers, enemies of God was the work of sin. The Bible speaks of the Gentiles as "being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel" (Eph. 2:12), and Paul speaks about those "being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart" (Eph. 4:18). The heart of man's trouble is that he is alienated from God. God and man have become strangers to each other, and bringing them together again is the *at-oneing* work, the atoning work, of the Lord Jesus Christ.

There is a popular notion that to *atone* for something is to pay up for it. When sin came and separated man from God, the doom of impending destruction hung over man's heart like a Damocles sword. He felt cut off and alienated from God. In His work of atonement Christ dealt with man's sin and guilt. He absorbed the penalty; He paid the fine; He suffered in man's place. "The chastisement of our peace was upon him; and by his stripes we are healed" (Isa. 53:5). In that sense, He paid up for man, and it can be considered a vital aspect of atoning, but the strict meaning of *atone* is the bringing of God and man together again at one.

A word that is very closely associated with *atone* is *reconciliation*. Reconciliation conveys practically the same idea but with special emphasis upon the removing of guilt. In reconciling there is an awareness that a disturbing factor has been removed, and two who have been aliens have been brought together because what separated them has been taken out of the way. In the Biblical sense, reconciliation takes place when sin is removed and man and God are brought together. It is bound up with the work of Christ. "All things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation . . . God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them . . ." (2 Cor. 5:18-19).

Atonement lays emphasis on the immediate result of being *reconciled*. When the reconciliation takes place and man is brought back into the presence of God so that he can have dealings with Him, he is *at one* with God. In the Bible, reconciliation and atonement are always used with reference to the forgiveness of sin. The Lord Jesus died for man that man might not need to die, because when He died for man, He carried man's sins away, leaving nothing between God and man. In that sense, Christ reconciled us to God. But, He not only reconciled us, He brought us back together with God, which is

the atonement.

Once each year there was a special day when the children of Israel met together for the purpose of celebrating the atonement. "On the tenth day of this seventh month there shall be a day of atonement" (Lev. 23:27). On that day when they came together to worship God, Aaron was to bring "two kids of the goats for a sin offering" (Lev. 16:5). "And Aaron shall cast lots upon the two goats; one lot for the Lord, and the other lot for the scapegoat" (Lev. 16:8). When the people had confessed their sins on the one goat, it would be taken out into the wilderness and turned loose and with it went all the sins of the people. It was the scapegoat. The other goat was put to death. Its blood was shed. These ceremonies pictured to the people the fact that their sins were carried away and their guilt was removed.

Every Old Testament sacrifice represents an aspect of the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ on Calvary's cross fulfilled every one of these things. In Himself, when He died, He took man's sins away. In Himself, when His blood was shed, He took away man's guilt so that he could be forgiven.

When the sacrifice was offered up on the Day of Atonement, the priest shed the blood at the altar, brought it into the presence of God, and sprinkled it in the Holy Place. This was evidence that a substitute, an innocent creature, had died for the guilty people. God would accept the sacrifice as being agreeable to the demands of righteousness because the guilt had been expiated, the debt had been paid, and the law had been honored. After receiving from God the assurance that the sacrifice was acceptable, the priest would come out to the people, and raising up his hands to heaven, he would pronounce upon them that their sins had been forgiven. There would then be great joy and a time of feasting, because they had been reconciled to God and the atonement had been effected.

It would not be fair to speak of the atonement without mentioning the idea of joy and gladness that is associated with it. From the human point of view, atonement is like making up after a quarrel. All young lovers know about this. A make-up after a lover's quarrel is two people coming back together after having been alienated. To state it very personally, if you have ever had anything come between you and someone you dearly love, it caused you to have uneasy feelings, perhaps even great grief. When the two of you were at one again it meant there had been genuine forgiveness, and this was occasion for great joy.

Paul, writing to the Romans, said, "We also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement" (Rom. 5:11).

THE PRIESTS

Priests hold a very prominent place in the Old Testament. Ordinarily a *priest* is considered to be a sacred person who serves as go-between between the people and God. The office of the priest is not found only in the Bible, as heathen and pagan religions too have priests. The office and the function of the priest, as revealed in the Bible, however, is unique and differs in many important respects from the role of the priesthood in non-Christian religions.

Three offices of service are spoken of in the Bible. Each of them has a special meaning for us, and all of them find their fulfillment in Jesus Christ. They are *prophet*, *priest*, and *king*.

The word *prophet* literally means "before, or for to speak." In the Biblical sense a *prophet* is one who proclaims or speaks for God. The function of the prophet was that of taking the Word of God and communicating it to men. His specific work was called *prophesying*. Today we understand that prophesying is, generally speaking, the interpreting of the Bible. Any man who takes the Scriptures and interprets them to human beings is prophesying. The office of prophet was usually filled by a man, but there are instances related in the Bible where women were used of God as prophetesses. Miriam, the

sister of Moses, is referred to as a prophetess (Ex. 15:20). Deborah prophesied during the period of the Judges (Judg 4:4). The New Testament makes mention of "Anna, a prophetess" (Luke 2:36).

The word *king* is used in the Bible to refer to a sovereign ruler. Although neighboring nations were ruled by kings for many centuries, Israel did not have a king until the period of the Judges (circa 1100 B.C.) At a time when there was much bloodshed, strife and disorder, they demanded that a king be placed over them to avoid the confusion of having every man doing what was right in his own eyes. Samuel anointed Saul as the first king of Israel (1 Sam 10:1).

The *king* was the director. He could be likened to a policeman who directs traffic. The policeman may not be any more intelligent or clever than the people driving the cars, but he performs a most necessary function. Any kind of traffic cop is better than a traffic jam, and a traffic jam is what results when a number of cars converge on one segment of highway without the services of a traffic director. Such a person was the king. He served by directing the activities of the individuals in the kingdom so that a common purpose was served.

The unique function of the *priest* is found in his ability to approach God on behalf of people who had sinned. No Israelite would dare approach the Lord God of hosts without a mediator, someone who would plead his cause. In the first place, the sinner would not know how to approach God. In the second place, he would feel unworthy because of sin in his life. God gave His people the priesthood in order that certain persons could be set apart to make sacrifices for the people's sin and thus gain the forgiveness of God. This representative or mediator was called a *priest*. Priests in the Old Testament had it in their heart and mind to bring weak, bewildered sinners into the presence of God in order that their sin might be forgiven. The manner and way in which they did this was presented in the first section of this chapter when we considered the Tabernacle. Although the priestly office was hereditary, they were considered to be exceptional men. They were sensitive to the needs of the people and had ". . . compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way" (Heb. 5:2).

In the New Testament, the office of the priest is performed by Christ Jesus. It is also said of the Lord Jesus that He was made "a priest forever after the order of Melchisedec" (Heb. 5:6). The name Melchisedec is mentioned in Genesis 14, and the story told there is reiterated in Hebrews 7, which says that Melchisedec was the man to whom Abraham went after winning the victory over the enemy who had defeated and taken Lot and the King of Sodom captive. In that situation, Abraham worshipped in the presence of Melchisedec. Nothing was known about him except that he was a king and priest; Abraham bowed down before him, and God has made Christ "a priest forever after the order of Melchisedec." That is to say, God made Christ, who was a king, also a priest. This extends to Christians, also, for the Bible says that the Lord Jesus Christ "hast made us unto our God kings and priests" (Rev. 5:10). Looking into the original language, some feel that that could well be translated "a kingdom of priests." Peter says that we are "a royal priesthood" (1 Pet. 2:9). The Christian has been called by the Lord Jesus Christ to be a king, in that he is to rule, and a priest, in that he is to pray for others.

The most important thing a Christian can be king of is himself. He is to take himself in hand and serve the Lord. The Bible says, "He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city" (Prov. 16:32). God has made men to be kings in that they are to control themselves and walk in His ways.

One of the distinctive doctrines of world-wide Protestantism is the priesthood of all believers. Christians are to understand that they are to be interested in other people and seek to help them toward God.

The function of the Old Testament priest was to represent the sinner before God. A word used in the

New Testament to describe this priestly function is *advocate*. An advocate is one who pleads the case of another, a lawyer. The lawyer appears in court on behalf of the accused. When the man's name is called in court, he does not have to do anything more than simply identify himself. Everything will be taken care of by his advocate, who will see to it that things are conducted in such a way that his welfare will be safeguarded.

"And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John 2:1). Christ intercedes in the presence of God for sinful man. He will not claim that the man has done no wrong. As an advocate, He will confess the man's sin before God. He will not stop with this, however; He will also re- mind God that a sacrifice has been offered, a substitution has been made. Because another has paid the penalty, it is perfectly right for God to forgive the penitent man of his sin.

". . . because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps" (1 Peter 2:21). That puts the responsibility upon the Christian to be a priest, an advocate of other people, going into the presence of God and talking to Him for those people who for any reason look to the Christian for help in coming to receive the blessing of God. John says, "If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death" (1 John 5:16). The Book of Hebrews states that the Lord Jesus Christ "is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them" (Heb. 7:25). That is why the Christian's salvation is sure, because the living Lord Jesus Christ is now interceding for him. Every Christian has priestly work to do in praying for others.

THE SHEKINAH GLORY

The whole Old Testament's program of worship was directed to bringing a sinner into the presence of God. When the sinner stood before God, his life would be affected and changed. It was therefore absolutely necessary for each person to come into the presence of God.

Someone might say, "Why doesn't the sinner just do that?" The reason a person could not come boldly into the presence of God is because the holiness of God is such that He would have to judge sin. He has to come before God in a way that is acceptable to Him. When a person is really aware of the greatness and the holiness of God and feels his own limitations, such a person has difficulty in coming to God and in feeling that he has satisfied God's requirements. Until he feels he has satisfied God's requirements, he cannot have the peace and joy he so sorely needs. When a man feels that somehow those with whom he is dealing are really holding something against him, he cannot enter into a full fellowship with them. In order to have a full fellowship with a person, I need to have an assurance there is nothing between me and that other person.

When a child has disobeyed his parents, the parents use discipline, sometimes prolonged discipline. The child may not be immediately willing to admit wrong. He may be rebellious or sulky. As long as the child's attitude is one of opposition, the parent cannot fully receive the child back again. This contention and tension can build up and so deeply affect the child that he is not sure he has fulfilled everything the parents required even though he may have done all he can. He has a feeling that perhaps his parents may still hold something against him. There must be some form of acceptance. It is often a case of "kiss and make up." Perhaps the mother takes the child into her arms and soothes the child in some way. If the quarreling is between men, a commonly recognized gesture for showing it is over and done is to "shake hands on it."

In the Bible God made use of this characteristic of mankind, and He had a way of showing man that

everything was all right. The children of Israel built the tabernacle according to the exact plans given to Moses by God; each article of furniture was set in its prescribed place to aid the priest in approaching God; the priests further performed their required functions in the offering of the sacrifices; and when everything had been done exactly as it should be done, "Then a cloud covered the tent of the congregation and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle" (Ex. 40:34). This glory was so brilliant that no man could bear it. It is referred to as the *Shekinah Glory* - the visible manifestation of the Divine Majesty. *Shekinah* is a Hebrew word. There is no word for it in the English language. As nearly as can be told, this Hebrew word means "the glory of glories" - the most glorious glory of all, the brightest light that could possibly be.

Later when the temple was built, the Bible says, "that the cloud filled the house of the Lord, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud; for the glory of the Lord had filled the house of the Lord" (1 Ki. 8:10-11). This was again called the *Shekinah Glory*. It was a mark of God's approval upon complete, total obedience.

How would man know for sure that reconciliation between himself and God was complete? In the matter of atonement, how would the sinner know that the atonement for his sin had been satisfying to God? How would the worshipper know that the priest had offered the prayer that was acceptable to God? God arranged to show His approval by manifesting His presence in a bright cloud of glory.

An understanding of the term *Shekinah Glory* gives insight into Pentecost in the New Testament. Christian people understand that the church is the temple of the living God, the church being the Christian people themselves. "Seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands" (Acts 17:24) Paul writes, "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you" (1 Cor. 3:16).

The Lord Jesus Christ had given His disciples certain instructions recorded in Acts 1 and 2. Christ had shown Himself alive to them; He had been with them some forty days, and He had spoken to them concerning the Kingdom of God. He also "commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which ye have heard of me ... ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence" (Acts 1:4-5). The disciples had been waiting before God in prayer for ten days, during which time they arranged for someone to take Judas's place so there would again be twelve apostles. Everything was done strictly according as they had been told. They had been faithfully obedient to God. "And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them" (Acts 2:2-3). There was a physical, outward manifestation that indicated the indwelling presence of God. "And they were filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues" (Acts 2:4). "And there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews . . . out of every nation . . . and every man heard them speak in his own language" (Acts 2:5-6). Here God is seen showing His approval of man's obedience by manifesting His presence. This was the real *Shekinah Glory*.

When reading the story of Pentecost, do not let the strange events and the unusual descriptions be discouraging and dim the eye from seeing the truth. The truth is that when man comes before God, faithfully, obediently seeking His face and yielding himself to Him, God will manifest His presence with the consciousness of Himself in man's heart. God is, and God can be approached. A sinning person can come to God. He must come to God by accepting the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ for his sins. Christ's blood will cause his sins to be removed, and he will come into the presence of God to worship, having met the requirements laid down by Him. God will manifest His presence to him and give him the assurance of His personal acceptance.

The Lord God, although man cannot see Him, knows man. Man's heart is an open book as far as God is concerned. When man obeys Him, comes to Him, yields to Him, commits himself in consecration to do His will, God will manifest Himself to man by giving him a sense of His presence. He will give His word. He will let men know they actually belong to Him.

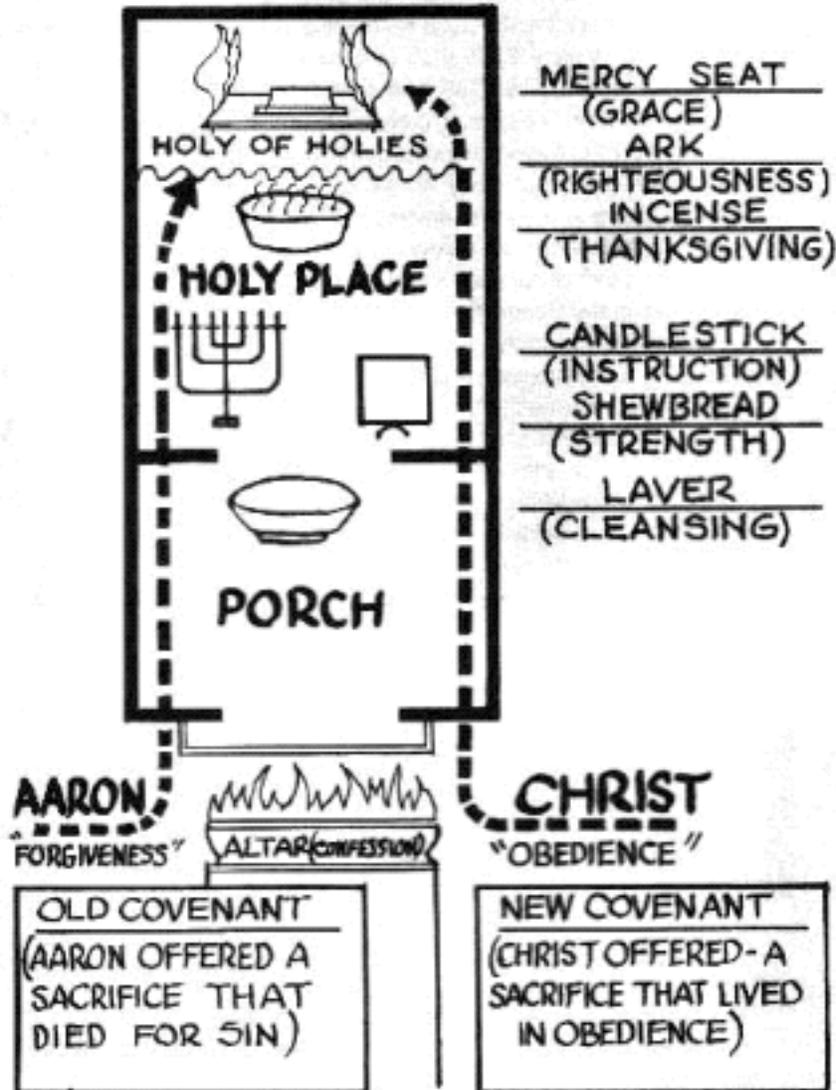
The experience of being filled with the Holy Spirit of God, being conscious that God is with man, will comfort his heart, inspire him in service, and give assurance. Peter describes such persons as those "Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Pet. 1:5).

The New Testament states that God will fill man with His Holy Spirit. Being filled with the Holy Spirit of God, in man's experience today, is the *Shekinah Glory* which is pictured in the tabernacle and in the temple of the Old Testament.

PRIESTHOOD

God has provisions for a guilty person to come into the presence of a Holy God.

THE TABERNACLE



Artwork courtesy of H. C. Surrall