

Priests 07-02-18 AM

The English word “priest” comes from a transliteration of the word “presbyter”, which in the Bible means elder. In fact, this is a mistaken transliteration. The word that is actually translated as priest in the Bible (**kohen** in Hebrew, **heireus** in Greek) refers to one who ministers at an altar in religious service.

The first priest mentioned in the Bible turns out to be the last priest mentioned in the Bible, in a fashion. *And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; now he was a priest of God Most High* -Genesis 14:18. We are told in the book of Hebrews 7 that Melchizedek was a form of Jesus as the ultimate High Priest.

What is a priest? In Hebrews 5 there is a description of the work of the high priest that succinctly describes the work of a priest. There it lists several things that determine the work of a priest. First, a priest is one selected by God for a specific purpose. Second, that purpose is to offer gifts and sacrifices to God. Third, a priest is given special garments to minister in before God. Finally, an altar is established in a sacred place for them to serve.

The priesthood is revealed this way in the Old Testament priesthood. Originally God called the firstborn sons of Israel to be His priests (Exodus 13:12). However, this seems to have changed soon afterwards (perhaps the rebellion at Mt. Sinai and the events of Exodus 32:26) and God selected from the tribe of the Levites the sons of Aaron to serve as the priests of God (Numbers 3:12-13). God would make Aaron the chief of the priests (Exodus 29:9), designing for him special garments to set him apart from the other priests. This position would pass down among Aaron’s sons until the time of Christ.

When Jesus died, the covenant of Moses was fulfilled, and the priesthood of Aaron was put away. It was replaced by the priesthood of Christ. This is described in Hebrews 5:5-10. There we are told that Jesus was anointed by God (when He arose from the grave). We receive an image of Jesus being clothed in glory by God (Consider the prophetic images of the high priest Joshua clothed by God in Zechariah 3).

More importantly for us is the priesthood that serves under Christ and in Christ. Today, the priests of God are those who are in Christ. All of them. The New Testament is abundantly clear that all Christians are priests of God, stated in places such as 1 Peter 2:4-10. In the church that Jesus built there is no distinction in members; all are priests. There are no laity and clergy. In fact, Mark 10:42-44 tells us that there is to be no hierarchy of members in the body of Christ.

There are four important ideas in being priests of God. First, it is being called by God. Second, it is the sacrifices we offer. Third, it is serving on the correct altar. Finally it is wearing the proper garments.

Priests of Christ are called by God and determined by God. This is not saying that we are individually called and predetermined to our salvation. Instead, we are told in places such as John 6 that God calls us by His word, and that our calling is accepted by obedience (Ephesians 1:13). But it is important to make it clear: only God gets to determine who belongs to Him, and He does so by our obedience to His word (Matthew 7:11).

Priests of Christ must offer acceptable sacrifices. Our High Priest has offered the ultimate sacrifice for sin according to Hebrews 9:26. But we can offer those gifts to God that are acceptable. It is us, ourselves. Romans 12:1, Hebrews 13:15, and elsewhere we are told that we are living sacrifices for God, meant to be pleasing to Him as gifts. We offer these in Christ, meaning as Christians.

Priests of Christ can only offer sacrifices to God on the correct altar. This altar is not one made with hands (Consider that the altar of Israel could only be unhewn stones). Instead, it is described as being our own hearts in Hebrews 13:10. This makes sense, since altars are found in temples, and the heart is within our bodies, the temple of God (1 Corinthians 6:19). As well, we worship God as the body of Christ (2 Corinthians 6:16).

Priests of Christ are known by God because they are clothed in Christ per Galatians 3:27. By putting on Christ we put on the garments of priesthood. We put this on when we are baptized; thus, when we become Christians we are also becoming priests of Christ.