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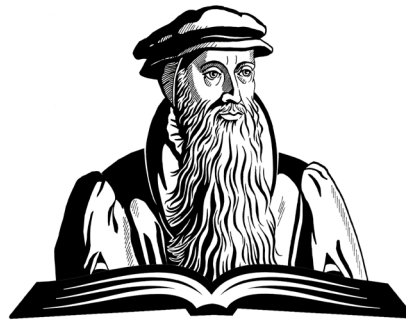
VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

by Rev. Jonathan Mattull

Lecture #18

Christ's Office of Priest

Catechism Question 25



The John Knox Institute
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Lecture #18

Christ's Office of Priest

Question 25: *How doth Christ execute the office of a priest?*

Answer: *Christ executeth the office of a priest, in his once offering up of himself a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice, and reconcile us to God; and in making continual intercession for us.*

What a blessing that God has given us a Redeemer! The Redeemer, Jesus Christ, perfectly does all that is needed to save his people. There's nothing that they lack, or nothing that they need that Christ does not provide and do for them.

Well, last lesson we were introduced to the fact that "Christ, as our redeemer, executeth the offices of a prophet, of a priest, and of a king, both in his estate of humiliation and exaltation." We've already seen that, as a Prophet, he reveals the will of God for our salvation. Without this, we would lack the needed knowledge required for salvation.

Well today, we look another way our Redeemer does what it needed to save us. Particularly, we look at the second of those office, his priesthood. Notice Question #25 in the *Shorter Catechism*, "How doth Christ execute the office of a priest?" Again remember, the word "execute" means "carry out" or "accomplish." And so, how does Christ carry out, or how does Christ accomplish the office of a priest? And the Answer, "Christ executeth the office of a priest, in his once offering up of himself a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice, and reconcile us to God; and in making continual intercession for us."

Notice just a few of the words before we get into the main part of our lesson. The first of which is "satisfy." Here, this word means "to fulfill," or "meet the demand" of something else. When you get older, you may have a job. The job will have specific demands or requirements. And to satisfy those requirements means that you have satisfied what was demanded. You have done what was required.

Well, notice as well, the word "reconcile." This word means to bring enemies into a state of peace and friendship. The individuals were angry with one another. To be reconciled means that the cause of their disagreement has been dealt with, and they now are in a state of peace and friendship.

And another word, "intercession"—this refers to what someone does when they plead for blessings on behalf of another person. So if your friend needed help, you might go to a parent or to somebody else, and ask them to help your friend. You would be interceding for your friend.

Well, with that then, let's moving into our lesson more fully. In our lesson today, we'll consider

two things: first, the work of Christ our Priest; and second, the benefit of Christ our Priest.

So first then, the work of Christ our Priest. Again, remember that Christ does many things, and has done many things. But here, we're focusing upon his work as a priest. Well, in the Bible, a priest had a number of things to do, however, the majority of their work could be summarized by their focus on offering sacrifices and interceding for the people. So when you read through the work of the priest in the Old Testament, you're getting an insight of what our great and High Priest, Jesus Christ, would come to do now, what he has done, and even still is doing. Yet, he did something far better than what the priests in the Old Testament did. I encourage you, not necessarily now, but to make it a point that in the near future, you read through the book of Hebrews in the New Testament. As you do, you will see how Christ is a greater priest than the priests of the Old Testament. It's not because the priest of the Old Testament were bad, or that that priesthood was bad. It's because they were ordained as forerunners, and pictures, and pointers to Christ. When we look at the work of the priest in the Old Testament, we see a shadow, and we hear a whisper of what the great and ultimate Priest, Jesus Christ, would do. And so we can read the Old Testament with a great encouragement.

And we'll notice that the work of our Priest includes his offering up a sacrifice. Well, priests under the Old Testament would offer up sacrifices of lambs, and goats, and bulls, and other animals. They would even offer up sacrifices of various other kinds of food. A living animal would be presented to the priest, and the priest would ensure that that animal was qualified according to God's standards to be offered. Then the priest would offer up that animal as a sacrifice to God. We get a clear picture of this in the idea of sin offerings offered under the Old Testament.

Notice, as one example among many others, in Leviticus, chapter 4, verse 22 through 26. We read there of the sin offering: "When a ruler hath sinned, and done somewhat through ignorance against any of the commandments of the LORD his God concerning things which should not be done, and is guilty; or if his sin, wherein he hath sinned, come to his knowledge; he shall bring his offering, a kid of the goats, a male without blemish: and he shall lay his hand upon the head of the goat, and kill it in the place where they kill the burnt offering before the LORD: it is a sin offering. And the priest shall take of the blood of the sin offering with his finger, and put it upon the horns of the altar of burnt offering, and shall pour out his blood at the bottom of the altar of burnt offering. And he shall burn all his fat upon the altar, as the fat of the sacrifice of peace offerings: and the priest shall make an atonement for him as concerning his sin, and it shall be forgiven him."

Now there's a lot here, but notice the basics. A man sins. He's counted guilty as a sinner, a law breaker before God. He then brings this young goat, a male without blemish. He then lays his hand upon the head of that animal, a symbol of transferring his guilt to the animal. And the goat is now treated as the guilty party. It's killed. The priest takes its blood and applies it in order to make atonement, so that the man, the one who sinned, is now forgiven. So there's a sacrifice, an offering for the forgiveness of a sinner.

But now, let's turn our attention to our Priest, Jesus Christ. Christ offered up himself. He did not offer up an animal. He offered up himself. This is what John the Baptist meant when he pointed to Jesus Christ and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God." Christ was the ordained sacrificial victim. Now that doesn't mean that he was victimized, and something happened to him that he wasn't willing to happen. He came willingly to be the sacrifice. He was the appointed substitute. He was the sacrifice appointed by God for the offering.

Of course, what is amazing is that he is also the Priest. And so, in the Old Testament, the priest would take an animal, something different than himself, of course, and offer it up. But Christ, as the greater High Priest, takes himself, and offers up himself as the sacrifice. Well, notice Hebrews

9, verses 11 and 12. It's there we read of this very point, "But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us." As our Priest, he offered up himself. The blood that was shed was his own blood. The blood that makes atonement was his own blood. Now, this is not because he had sinned and needed to be punished himself. Instead, he was the substitute, the Lamb provided by God, who came on behalf of others. Just as the sacrificial animal had not sinned, neither had Christ sinned. He was the spotless Lamb of God. He was not offered up for his own sins. Instead, he was offered up for the sins of his people.

I want to encourage and challenge you to read through Isaiah 53. It's a small chapter. It's something you could work through very quickly. Perhaps, right after this lesson, get your Bible out, and turn to Isaiah 53, and read through it. And as you do, you'll see this point made very clearly. As you read through that chapter, notice two things. First, who is suffering? And second, for whom is he suffering? And what you'll find again, and again, and again, is that there's one person suffering, this servant of the Lord, the Lord Jesus Christ, and his suffering, all that he endures, is because of the sins of others. Well, read Isaiah 53, and you'll see it for yourself. You'll see that Christ offered up himself for his people.

Well, this offering particularly took place upon the cross. When you read of Christ going to the cross and suffering there, you're reading of Christ the Priest offering up himself in substitution for others. It's a work of his priesthood. And as you read through the Gospels, you'll get little glimpses of the zeal he had for this. There's a scene in the Gospels where he's nearing that day, and it describes him as going before the disciples. He is fixed upon his work of sacrifice that he wants to perform for the sake of his people. What a blessing to have so great a Priest to offer up himself. Well, we'll see in a moment what he accomplished by this offering, but for now, simply notice that, as Priest, Christ offered up himself in death upon the cross.

Well, second, regarding the work of our Priest, notice that he intercedes for us. We'll get in a moment to the benefit, which is the second main point, but right now, regarding what Christ does as Priest, notice that he intercedes for us. Christ's priestly work did not finish with his offering up of himself on the cross. It's true, as the Bible clearly states, he will never offer up himself again as a sacrifice. His sacrifice on the cross was a one-time event, never to be repeated, never needing to be repeated, for it perfectly accomplished what it was intended to do.

However, this doesn't mean that his work as Priest is finished. His sacrificial work ended, but his priestly work continues. Well, how does it continue? It continues by his continual intercession for his people. This is a key part of his priestly work. Notice Hebrews, chapter 7, verses 24 and 25. We read there, "But this man"—speaking of Jesus—"because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them." Did you hear that?—"he ever liveth." He's always living. For what?—to make intercession for them. Christ died, but Christ rose from the dead, and Christ ascended into heaven, and it's there that he's seated at the right hand of the Father, and we're told in Hebrews chapter 4 that he's seated on the throne of grace. Remember the ark of the covenant in the tabernacle and the temple, it was the throne of God, and the top of it was the seat of mercy, the mercyseat, or the seat of propitiation.

And Christ, in heaven, is seated on a throne of grace. But he's not lazily passing by the days, weeks, months, and years. He's still exercising his priesthood. He's doing so by making intercession, that is, he is pleading for God's blessing upon his people. He's presenting himself as

the one that was sacrificed, and he's pleading what he's accomplished that God would then bless his people. What a blessing indeed! Just as the high priest under the Old Testament bore the names of Israel and their tribes upon his shoulders and upon his breastplate, as he engaged in his priestly work, bringing before God, as it were, the names of God's people. So the Lord Jesus Christ, the High Priest of his people, bears the names of his people before his Father, ever presenting himself, and as he stands as their Priest, he presents them in him, seeking his Father's blessing upon them.

We gain something of a glimpse of this magnificent truth, in John chapter 17. It contains for us a beautiful prayer of the Lord Jesus Christ, one that you and I can't pray as he prayed it, because he's praying there as our High Priest. Well, I encourage you to read the whole chapter, and you'll see and get a little glimpse of Christ's interceding for his people. But just to give you a sense of it, here's one part of his intercession recorded there in John 17, verses 9 through 11. Jesus, praying to the Father, says, "I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine. And all mine are thine, and thine are mine; and I am glorified in them. And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one as we are." You see what he's doing? He's preparing for the time that he is going to ascend into heaven, and he's even speaking as if that time has come to pass. And he says, "My people are still in the world." So what does he do? He prays for them. This gives us a little insight into what Christ is doing right now for his people. He's praying for them, that his Father would keep them, guard them, preserve them, and protect them, that they may be his, and that they may be united, and that they may be kept by the power of God unto that last and great day. What a beautiful thing that Christ our Priest does!

Now, our second main point, the benefit of Christ our Priest. What is accomplished when Christ carries out his priesthood? Well, the *Catechism* says that he offered up himself, "a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice, and reconcile us to God." The truth of divine justice is a weighty truth. Man's justice in this world often fails. Sometimes it's not carried out at all. Sometimes the guilty go on without any punishment. Other times, it's carried out imperfectly. What should have been done isn't done in all the way it should be done, and other times justice is abused, and some innocent person is punished wrongly.

However God's justice is always, without fail, perfectly executed. It never fails. No one ever escapes it. No single transgression will ever go unpunished. What a mistake it is that many make in this world thinking that God will somehow look past their many sins, or that God will somehow not see their many sins. Oh, what a sober thought to realize that hell is the reality of God's justice, and every sin shall be punished.

Well, this is a great problem for us, because each of us has sinned against the Lord. Having sinned, justice must now be executed against us. We saw this in a previous question when we thought about that most grievous misery, the pains of hell forever. This is what every sin deserves. It is what every sin demands before a just and holy God. But remember what Christ did. He offered up himself a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice. This is what was taking place upon the cross. He, as Priest, was offering up himself as a sacrifice. And in doing so, he was fulfilling the demands of God's most holy justice. This means that his sacrifice fulfilled all that divine justice required.

This brings us to an important idea in the Bible. The word is translated in the Bible, "propitiation." You'll see it in Romans 3, verse 25, when we read, "Whom God"—speaking of Christ—"hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God." Christ is set forth as a propitiation. You'll see it also in 1 John 2, verse 2: "And he"—Christ—"is the propitiation for our sins: and not for

ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.” In both of these passages, Christ is shown to be the propitiation.

Well, what does this word “propitiation” mean? It refers to a sacrifice that removes the wrath of God against us by satisfying God’s divine justice. And moreover, it brings us then into a relationship of peace and fellowship. Notice, Romans 3:25 says this “propitiation is through faith in his blood”—his blood, that is, the sacrifice. It’s a sacrifice which propitiates or satisfies divine justice, and removes the wrath of God, and purchases peace with God. It brings forth the forgiveness of our sins. Earlier we referenced Hebrews 9, verse 25, and it’s there that we are told Christ’s sacrifice obtained eternal redemption for us. So what is it that Christ’s sacrifice accomplishes? It removes our sins by answering for them. Our sins were placed upon Christ, and Christ makes payment for them, so that then we are forgiven and accepted with God in peace. We’re redeemed—reconciled by the work of Christ our Priest upon the cross.

Additionally, we see that he makes continual intercession for us. We know his work consists primarily as Priest as offering up himself as sacrifice to satisfy divine justice, and reconcile us to God, and in making continual intercession for us. So what’s the benefit of that? Well, as he’s gone into heaven, he’s presenting himself, and he’s pleading there now and always himself and his work on our behalf, that all of the blessings of salvation will be provided unto his people. This means his people continue to receive, every day, not only in this life but in the life to come, the blessings of what Christ has accomplished, because he continues to plead his work on their behalf. This way his people continue to receive blessings from God throughout life, and throughout eternity, because Christ continues to pray for them, seeking this great blessing upon them.

What benefit do we have? Oh, how can we express it totally apart from saying “salvation”? Because Christ died on behalf of sinners, those sinners for whom he died are forgiven and reconciled to God. And because Christ lives and intercedes for them, they continue to receive all of the blessings of salvation because of him. Indeed, many benefits, innumerable benefits, rich benefits belong to them who have Christ as their Priest.

Well, let me close with two applications for you. First, consider what would happen to you if you do not have Jesus Christ as your High Priest. His offering which satisfies divine justice would not be yours. This means then that you—you—must bear God’s justice against you for your sins. You must pay God what you owe for sinning against him. This is a terrible thought, a dreadful thought, and a fact which cannot fully be understood. It is unbearable to think of the infinite wrath of God bearing down upon a sinner. Who, who can endure such wrath? What a blessing then that God holds out Christ the Savior to us, and says, “He is the Priest whose sacrifice satisfies divine justice.”

This means he’s held forth to us as our Redeemer, as our High Priest, and taking him means that we gain the benefit of his sacrifice. Taking Christ means that his sacrifice did not merely satisfy divine justice in some distant way, but it satisfied divine justice against us for our sins. We take him, and his payment is then for us. For the one who embraces Christ as Redeemer, Christ is his Priest, Christ’s sacrifice is applied to him, he has nothing else to pay—Christ has satisfied divine justice. He is reconciled to God, though once an enemy of God because of his sin. Now, because of Christ and his priestly work, he’s not only forgiven, but he’s brought into fellowship and friendship with God, and all of this is because of Jesus Christ. Oh, then, do not rest without Christ as your Redeemer.

Well, second, in closing, if you have trusted Christ as your Redeemer, think for just a moment that you have a constant cause of encouragement and rejoicing. I don’t mean that you don’t have

trials and troubles, but I do mean that you have a cause to rejoice still. Not only did his sacrifice satisfy divine justice for you, and reconcile you to God. In addition, He continues to seek God's blessings for you. Right now, as you've been listening to this lesson, Christ has been pleading what he has accomplished to be applied and to be a blessing to you. When you sleep, as a believer, and your mind drifts off from the state of consciousness, Christ is, as it were, awake praying for you. When your mind is fixed on other things throughout the day, his mind is fixed on your eternal good, as he pleads the blessings of God to be applied to you because of what he's done. Oh, what an encouragement this is! Think about it. Take time to meditate on it. He's pleading, believer, for you. Let us then learn to rejoice in him. Let us grow in our love for him. And let us give thanks to him for his ongoing work of intercession, by which we receive all of the blessings of God which he's purchased for his people.