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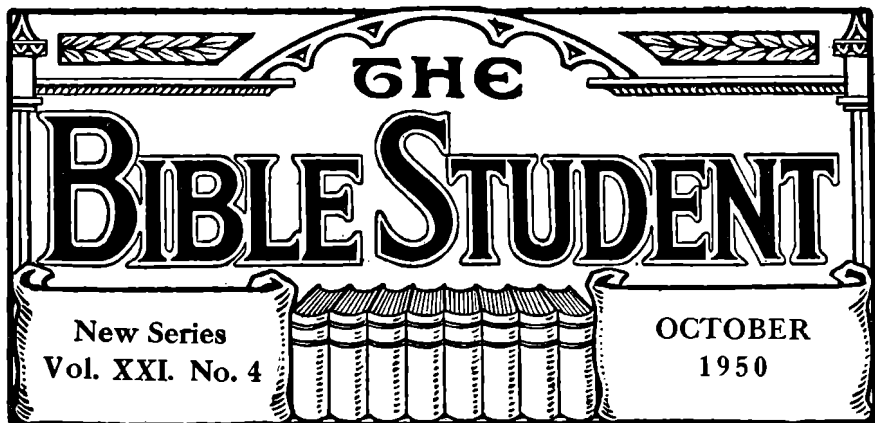
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*“ The Entrance of THY WORDS Giveth Light ”*

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*Editor: A. McDONALD REDWOOD*

# THE BELIEVER'S PRIESTLY SERVICE

The High Priesthood of Christ is acknowledged as a vital doctrine of the New Testament. The complimentary truth of the priesthood of all believers cannot be considered of any less importance. In a day when ultra-Biblical sacerdotalism is being pushed more than ever to the front in certain ecclesiastical circles this precious heritage of apostolic teaching needs to be given far greater prominence than it sometimes receives.

It is the one great truth that makes clear the believer's standing and privilege before God, with the right of immediate access to the Throne of His Grace at all times. The humblest and the greatest may boldly lay claim to the inexpressibly glorious prerogative of exercising this privilege on a common ground and without hint of invidious distinctions. This is, however, but one side of the whole truth. There is the other, equally cogent also, namely, the practical and *experimental* enjoyment of it in the daily life. This opens a wide subject of study too large to deal with here, but some very practical instruction is found in the rich typology of the Book of Exodus. The real text-book on the subject is, of course the N.T. For example, in such passages as 1 Peter 2:1-12; Heb. 10:19-22; Col. 4:12, 13; etc. For our present purpose we confine attention to Exodus, chapter 30.

This chapter lies within a distinctive section of the book, commencing at chapter 25:1, and ending at ch. 31:17. The whole section comprises a series of consecutive types illustrating the divine plan of Redemption: How God first moves out from the Ark (symbol of His own Presence in the heavenlies) until the Gate of the Court is reached in chapter 27:16. We have here God's coming out into the world in revelation of Himself and of His wondrous purposes of redeeming grace. The Cross is seen in the brazen altar where the sin-offering was burnt (Lev. 16); and the Gate of the Court is prophetic of Christ who proclaimed Himself the only Way of Salvation (John 10). But His purpose does not stop there. God's ultimate objective is in the reverse direction, namely, redeemed man being brought back into true fellowship with Himself within the holiest where He dwells. This aspect is presented in the types of chs. 28 to 31:17.

The subject of chapter 28 is the making of the holy garments for Aaron the high priest and for his sons. Typologically, we

have here the person and work of Christ as our great High Priest. The special robes "for glory and for beauty" (v. 2) reflect His divine character and glory, possessed of all authority to act as God's High Priest within a tabernacle not made with hands.

Verse 38 of this chapter relates the subject of the continual Burnt Offering. Here we see the type of Christ's offering of Himself to God as the *sole basis* of acceptable worship on the part of His people. All *our* priestly service is of value in the sight of God only because of what Christ is to God the Father. The Son perfectly glorified the Father; the Father finds in the Son infinite delight. God never meets His saints on other or lower ground than this in their capacity of priests. This is again seen in the fact that the kindling fire for the incense was brought from the altar of Burnt Offering, expressive of the redemptive energy of divine holiness applied to the believer, fitting him for priestly service.

Finally, the true purpose of all this is that God should "*dwell among* the children of Israel, and be their God: And they shall know that I am Jehovah their God. . . ." (vs. 45, 46). This is the very heart of God expressed in relation to His saints; they are beloved by Him, and His supreme desire is to sustain this unique fellowship between Himself and them without any kind of intermediation except that of Christ, Himself the High Priest. This is revealed again in Christ's High Priestly prayer in John 17 (specially vs. 23, 24).

This brings us to chapter 30. It is a chapter of strange "omissions", for everyone of the articles mentioned *here* is omitted in the place where *normally* it belongs in the large section noted above. Why this is so is not obvious at first sight, though various suggestions have been made. Prof. James McGregor thinks one reason may be that this is the order in which they were originally communicated to Moses by God. What is more evident to the spiritual intelligence is that there is *actually a real moral order* in the series of subjects, serving to focus attention on the *typical* presentation of a theme of greatest importance to every true Christian, the functioning of the believer as a priest in the presence of God—or, within "the heavenlies", a phrase characteristic of Paul's letter to the Ephesians. The several subjects of this chapter set out the *essential conditions* characteristic of and governing all priestly service, and how it is to be maintained according to the will of God.

There are five distinct sections—the first of which is

### THE GOLDEN ALTAR

#### 1. Our Priestly Privilege (vs. 1-10)

The altar of incense occupied the central position within the first compartment of the tabernacle. Beyond, and within the holy of holies, was the ark of the covenant, hidden from view by the veil between the two compartments (ch. 25:10-22). As already stated, it denoted the dwelling place of God, with its golden mercy-seat covering where God communed with His people (25:22).

The supreme point of difference, however, between the O.T. picture and the N.T. reality is the *absence of the veil* between. It has been rent in twain (Matt. 27:51). Now "we have boldness to enter into the holiest" (Heb. 10:19). The phrase "draw near" is used in this epistle several times to denote this; as being essential, indeed, to true spiritual worship.

The sole purpose of the altar was the burning of the incense by Aaron (v. 7). With him were associated his sons, as seen in ch. 28 and 1 Chron. 6:49, constituting a "family of priests". This expresses in type the spiritual relation between Christ and His saints, with their corresponding privilege of exercising their priestly functions before God. Rev. 8:3, 4 bears this out, for it speaks of Christ as giving efficacy "to the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which is before the throne." Wonderfully blessed that He so associates us with Himself in this most holy service!

Remark how everything in this divine economy (illustrated by the whole tabernacle) is sustained in and by the power of such priestly intercession, whether that of the great High Priest alone, or that of believers in association with Him. There can be no fruit in personal testimony, no progress in the extension of Christ's kingdom, apart from such service. "Everything that is for God's pleasure is sustained by it. It gives character to the prayers, the service, the praises, the worship of the saints, and finds its fullest expression in Christ—the priestly Head glorified at the right hand of God."

Moreover our prayers and intercessions have an almost universal bearing; we are to pray for "all men"; for "all saints"; at "all seasons" (1 Tim. 2:1-4; Eph. 6:18; see also Heb. 13:15, 16).

Think of the incense that went up from Epaphras "labouring" for the saints in his prayers "that they may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God" (Col. 4:12, 13). In contrast, how often our prayers centre almost entirely on ourselves and our own needs. But does this not rather more correspond to "the Israelite praying in his own tent"? It is another thing to offer incense as a priest at the golden altar, where the Lord's interests and testimony are paramount, and this gives prayer an entirely different character.

A final point worth noticing is the relation between the golden candlestick and the altar mentioned in verses 7 and 8. Both (with the table of shewbread described in ch. 25:23-30) were placed in the holy place. The lamps of the candlestick and the incense for the altar were attended to morning and evening. They were combined ministries. This suggests that our priestly service must ever be joined with our personal testimony to and for Christ in the power of the Spirit. We are "the light of the world", hence, "*let your light so shine before men . . . that ye may glorify your Father which is in heaven*" (Matt. 5:14-16). In fact, the latter is only effective, only possible even, when the former is fully exercised in the joy and fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

## THE ATONEMENT MONEY

### 2. Our Priestly Position (vs. 11-16)

The atonement money had to be paid by every Israelite as "a ransom". The amount was a half shekel (or 10 gerahs) according to the standard of the Sanctuary. The rich were not to give more, nor the poor less, for all were equally "precious" to God as His people.

With this money the silver sockets of the Tabernacle were made, also the hooks of the pillars and the connecting rods (ch. 38:25-28). So that every Israelite, even the humblest, had literally "a stone in the building", namely, his half-shekel weight of silver in its foundations (ch. 25:19, 21). They were already a redeemed people, but this was their individual "memorial" before God, indicating that they belonged to Him and He to them—*silver* always speaks of redemption.

In type we see here a ransomed people in intimate relationship with Christ the Redeemer, and owning His claims upon them. The N.T. correlative is 1 Corinthians 6:19, 20—"ye are *bought*

*with a price*, therefore glorify God in your body." He claims us for His worship and service, because positionally and morally fitted for such.

Hence ours is the privilege of acknowledging practically the consequent responsibility (*ten* is the number of *responsibility* in Biblical numerics) of yielding to His claims. Paul puts it thus: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable (or spiritual) service" (Rom. 12:1, 2, R.V.). As someone has put it, "Christ expiated that the Christian might be dedicated"—to such priestly ministry as we speak of: "That we being delivered . . . might serve without fear, in holiness and righteousness *before Him*, all the days of our life" (Lk. 1:74, 75). Our position before God is our privilege to function as priests.

## THE LAVER

### 3. Our Priestly Purity (vs. 17-21)

The laver stood in the court of the tabernacle where the priests ministered daily at the brazen altar. It contained the water necessary for the constant ablutions of the priests, whether serving at the altar or within the tabernacle.

In type this washing of the hands and feet is not for salvation, but presupposes salvation (typified by the altar). It points to the necessity of practical holiness in daily life and walk, if our service is to be acceptable to God. "Who shall stand in the holy place? . . . He that hath clean hands and a pure heart, who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity" (Ps. 24:3, 4; Heb. 10:22). Paul's appeal was that men "pray in every place, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting (or 'disputing')" (1 Tim. 2:8). And the Lord Himself taught His disciples the necessity of the *feet* being washed (John 13:3-13). The believer needs this daily cleansing from the defilements of the way, and in our work. But do we sufficiently appreciate the inescapable *consequences* of failure just here? Note how twice over in this section it says: "*That they may not die*" (vs. 20, 21), implying they would die if they failed to obey! Paul writes to the Corinthians sternly, "there is among you jealousy and strife, are ye not *carnal*?" (1 Cor. 3:2, 3). And more solemn still: "many among you are weak and sickly, and not a few sleep (have died)" (ch. 11:30-32). It is, indeed, a solemn though blessed thing to serve the Lord "in the *beauty* of

holiness". "Be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the Lord" (Isa. 52:11).

But, *how* is this "cleanness" morally to be maintained? The answer is: "By the washing (lit. 'laver') of water *with the Word*" (Eph. 5:26). It is the cleansing power of the Word of God applied to conscience and heart—read John 15:3, 17; Ps. 119:9; John 17:17.

Supplementary to this objective aspect is the subjective truth typified in the fact that the material used for the laver was obtained through the voluntary surrender of the "looking-glasses" (which were made of burnished bronze) of the women folk (ch. 38:8). So that the very material of the laver spoke of surrender; a willingness to part with what might make much of self, in order that conditions of holy purity might be maintained. The great apostle was himself a wonderful example of this sanctified self-surrender: "what things were gain to me, these have I counted loss for Christ" (study the whole of vs. 7-9 of Eph. 3).

### THE ANOINTING OIL

#### 4. Our Priestly Prerequisite (vs. 22-23)

The anointing oil was composed of the choicest ingredients of their kind, "compounded after the (art) of the perfumer." It was applied to every part of the tabernacle, and upon the persons of Aaron and his sons (cf. Lev. 8:30).

It is not difficult to see in this the New Testament teaching on the paramount place and presence of the Holy Spirit in the church, and in the individual believer's ministry—in fact, in everything that is of and for God. The Lord Himself was anointed with the Spirit, as Isaiah foretold seven hundred years before He came: "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because *He anointed me* to preach good tidings . . ."; which was fulfilled at the start of His public ministry (Isa. 61:1; Lk. 4:18, 19, 21). In fact, this is the third occasion of the mention of the anointing of Christ by the Spirit in this prophecy; the first in ch. 11:2, fulfilled at the Incarnation; the second in ch. 42:1, fulfilled at the Baptism. Peter makes special reference to this anointing when opening the door of the Gospel to the Gentile world (Acts 10:38).

The teaching in all these passages is that the Holy Spirit Himself *is* the anointing, and not merely the Agent in giving it. And what is true of Christ is true of the believer-priest: "*Ye have*



an anointing from the Holy One (the Lord) . . ." (1 John 2: 20, 27). "He that . . . *anointed us* is God . . . who gave us the earnest of *the Spirit* in our hearts" (2 Cor. 1: 21, 22). "*We . . . worship by the Spirit* of God, and glory in Christ Jesus, and have *no confidence in the flesh*" (Phil. 3:3). The latter clause is the N.T. correlative of the divine injunction in Exodus—"upon *man's flesh* shall it (the anointing oil) *not* be poured" (verse 32). If there is one thing more than another abhorrent to God, it is the simulation of worship on the part of a carnally minded Christian, bereft of the Spirit's unction. Note the tragic illustration of this in Korah's rebellion against Moses in Numbers 16. (Cf. Jude 11).

It is well to recall just here that classic passage in John 4: 21-25 where Christ reveals the true nature of the worship we speak of, that it must be "in spirit and in truth", just because "God IS Spirit" (not *a* spirit). The Father is seeking those who will actually worship Him thus. It is not ritual but state of soul, an exercise of heart and conscience, for which the Holy Spirit's "anointing" is the supreme prerequisite.

## THE UNIQUE INCENSE

### 5. The Prevailing Theme in Priestly Service (vs. 34-38)

It was the incense that gave value to the altar; and the incense to become efficacious in the sight of God must be burnt on the altar. Its composition, like that of the anointing oil, was divinely prescribed, meticulously compounded and carefully safeguarded from all imitation (v. 32). We cannot take up the several ingredients, but the whole is expressive of all "the excellencies" of the Incarnate Son who "gave Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for an odour of a sweet smell" (1 Pet. 2:9, R.V.). This He has become to and for us before God, and through His merits alone we worship acceptably in the holiest.

The efficacy of our priestly service and its acceptance before God is based on CHRIST'S (a) perfect Life; (b) atoning Death; (c) Resurrection glory; and (d) High-priestly ministry at the right hand of the Majesty on high. And the character of our ministry will be largely determined by our personal appreciation of the glorious perfections of Christ as Saviour, Sanctifier, and High Priest.

If there is any yet higher aspect, it is in the realm of what

Christ is to the Father—His supreme delight and in Whom His soul finds unutterable joy! What satisfaction it affords the Father to have the fragrance of that incense ever before Him! And when we, all our human frailties notwithstanding, rise to the heights of spiritual apprehension of these great verities so that the soul takes hold upon God in a mutual enjoyment of the One Theme of eternal praise—we begin to learn how to fulfil the divine ideal of our priestly service.

It is well to note that the incense was to be "*salted*, pure and holy", implying preservation from possible deterioration, or lack of "freshness" when used. Such exercise of heart and soul in the holiest as we have spoken of needs this safeguard, for there is nothing so quickly mars such heart exercise as "staleness" which easily leads to indifference, unreality, formality, self-centredness in the prayer life. Hence "have salt in yourselves" (read Mark 9:49, 50).

The Psalmist voices the true spirit of the devout worshipper as he offers incense on the golden altar: "Give unto the LORD the glory due unto His name . . . Honour and majesty are before Him, strength and beauty are in His sanctuary . . . O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness." (Ps. 96). "O God thou art my God; early will I seek thee: My soul thirsteth for thee . . . So have I looked upon thee in the sanctuary, to see thy power and thy glory. . . For thy lovingkindness is better than life . . . and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips" (Ps. 63:1-5. See also Ps. 73:28).—A. McD. R.

## EXEGETICAL STUDY OF COLOSSIANS

### Ch. 3, vs. 5-11

The third main section of the epistle commences here and continues to ch. 4:6. It is distinctively *practical* in character. Spurgeon is said to have remarked in his quaint manner that this chapter begins in heaven and ends in the kitchen. All through it deals with high spiritual things on the level of "the common round and daily task" of life. The apostle now seeks to apply what he has been saying of being dead *with* and yet alive *in* Christ, to various aspects of the Christian's public testimony before the world.