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THE PRIESTHOOD OF CHRIST.

HEBREWS iv. 14-16.

THERE is often vagueness found in the thoughts of many a child of God as to the priesthood of our Lord Jesus, as to what its place and proper action is, as well as what it is founded on—what its relation to other truths, more particularly to redemption—what it is that God secures to us by it—what the portion that the saint enjoys in virtue of it, or consequently loses if he have it not. All these various ways in which priesthood may be examined will be found somewhat indefinite, I think, in the minds even of most real believers; and it is wise in general never to assume that a truth is known till we have proved it.

We often take for granted, finding the children of God happy together in fellowship, that they must know this or that truth; but it by no means follows. They may be using language beyond what they have actually learnt from God. The mass are apt to be carried along by others (and this even where their words would give little suspicion) by the faith of others. This is easily understood. They do not doubt in their own minds that it is all quite true, having the general sense and savour, and surely not without some enjoyment of it; but still they have not thoroughly sought out and realized the mind of God for their souls, receiving the

truth distinctly and decidedly from God. If exposed to misleading influences they might soon and seriously be turned aside, at the least be perplexed and tried by questions easily raised, and often for the very purpose of confounding those whose general confession puts to shame such as are walking in the ways of the world. And these are days, brethren, when we need to have everything from God for our own souls.

Assuredly, one need say no more to urge the importance of every child of God, simply and thoroughly, searching into His word; if they do know, having it so much the more happily confirmed to their souls, and if they have not yet ascertained it for their own souls, searching and seeing what God has to show and give them. They have the truth in having Christ, I need not say; but it is well to have it fairly out for our souls. His priesthood goes on for us whether we enter intelligently or not into what our portion is in it and by it. But is it not of the greatest importance that we should know how suited, and rich, and constant the grace of our Lord Jesus is? Indeed, it is this which makes it so blessed, because the truth we are about to look at now is bound up with Christ. He is all in it. There may be the reflection of His grace; there may be the working of it, no doubt poorly and imperfectly, in souls on earth who enter a little into their priestly character and blessing; but this is altogether of a different bearing after all from His relation to us; for it is not now simply priestly grace in activity of love for others, but that which our own souls indispensably want in order to be carried through the wilderness.

And I call your attention to this point at the start of the observations I have to make (and you will see how true it is when you reflect upon it): the whole



Epistle to the Hebrews supposes a redeemed people pilgrims and strangers on the earth. They are not in Egypt; they are not in Canaan; they are passing through the wilderness. The very same people may be viewed, if not in Egypt, certainly as being in heavenly places even now; but such is not the aspect in which the children of God are viewed in this epistle. In no case here do we find them invested with that character of blessings which we have, for instance, in Ephesians and in a measure even in Colossians. We do not find anything at all of resurrection with Christ either; although this too, of course, it need hardly be said, has its immense importance, and Romans, Philippians, and other epistles take it up.

But here we have distinctively the Spirit of God starting first of all with Christ at God's right hand in heaven; and this is an essential feature of His priesthood. So long as He was upon earth He could not be a priest. His is an exclusively heavenly priesthood; and those for whom He is acting are a heavenly people. The time was come for God to form and fashion them accordingly. There were saints of old waiting, with more or less light of heavenly hopes, looking for the city above—the saints of the high or heavenly places, as the Spirit of God in the New Testament explains the expression to us. But still they looked up only in hope, and this, too, necessarily with vagueness. Here it is still in hope; but the veil is rent, and heaven opened, and the Spirit sent down because of Christ's redemption and glorification. There all is definite, without the least vagueness whatever. The ground and scene is clear and distinct from the very fact that Christ who purged our sins is in heaven, yet in living relationship with those He is not ashamed to call His brethren on earth.

Thus, even if we look at the Christian in this point of view, having a priest and passing through the wilderness, still there is a positive and present imprint of heaven upon all.

Hence, therefore, in chapter iii. those who are particularly contemplated in the epistle are called "partakers of the heavenly calling." It was not only that they were called to heaven by and by, but the One that called them was already in heaven, and in heaven on the ground of redemption already accomplished. This is another truth of the greatest possible, yea, indeed, primary importance; for the heavenly place of our Lord Jesus is here viewed as consequent on the accepted sacrifice of Himself for our sins, as in fact it was. It is no question at all of our Lord Jesus coming down from heaven. This, we know, is most true; and this too has its revelation elsewhere in a suited manner. But the point here with which the epistle opens is the great truth that the Lord by Himself purged sins, or our sins, it may be. I merely say this because there is a question of reading; but the question raised has nothing to do with the indisputable truth (and that is all that I affirm now, as it is perfectly certain) that the Lord Jesus went up to heaven, and took His place at the right hand of God, to enter on a new kind of action there, and this founded on the annulling of sin by the sacrifice of Himself.

But this at once clears the way for the application of Christ's priesthood to the believer. It supposes a people already redeemed. It supposes that the great and absolutely necessary work of grace on their behalf has been accomplished. It supposes that they are resting on it without a question, the main danger being that some may be tempted to give it and Him up, because of the

difficulties, the trials, the snares, the persecutions, the dangers of the way. And this we see to be before the mind of the Spirit of God every now and then in the Epistle to the Hebrews. You will find it very early brought up in chapter iii., and you may trace it continuously to nearly the last. It was what Satan was seeking to separate them from; but it was no question of whether the work was done. The whole doctrine of the epistle supposes that the Lord single-handed had finished the work which He undertook on earth. All that God contemplated to be done for sin—that God Himself could do in the way of blotting out sin—was already done before the Lord entered on His priesthood on high.

It is the want of seizing and holding fast that great truth which has thrown such confusion and darkness into the minds of most on the subject of Christ's priesthood, and which has made it vague to better instructed souls, and just in proportion to the weakness with which they hold the completeness of redemption. For, naturally, if the believer is not resting with his conscience purged and perfect now, the priesthood of Christ is thrown in to complete what is deficient. The true grace of the priesthood, therefore, is impaired, yea, lost; it becomes a mere maker up of weight; for the preliminary question must naturally be to know Christ, and one's sins forgiven through His blood. With most nowadays there is but a hope (for it rarely amounts to more throughout Christendom) of being with the Lord by and by. Thus the true place of the priesthood disappears, because redemption has never been received from God in its simplicity and its fulness; and Christ's walk and priesthood are thrown into the scale to make up what His death on the cross has done perfectly.

Certainly the Epistle to the Hebrews leaves no ground for any such hesitation. Before the Spirit of God enters on priesthood, we have, with the greatest precision and fulness, the person of the Lord Jesus brought out, and this in a twofold way. We behold Him as the Son of God; we see Him as the Son of man. And both natures were necessary to His priesthood. If He had not been God's Son in such a sense as none other was, there had been no such priesthood as that which this epistle sets before us. On the other hand, if He had not been the Son of man, in a sense too that was as real as that of others, but in a character that was peculiar to Himself, there had been no such priesthood available for us. The Lord Jesus was both; and as the first chapter presents Him particularly as Son of God, so the second as Son of man. At the end of this we have the first allusion to His priesthood. In both these chapters we have the fulness of redemption set forth.

We have already seen this in the first chapter; the second supposes the same fact. There we read, "It became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one."

Here again, then, we have a very important relation to His priesthood. It is a question of the sanctified, and of the sanctified only. None but the sanctified, we shall see, have to do with the priesthood of Christ. They are the persons contemplated. On the other hand, "by the grace of God he [Jesus] tasted death for every man." But after this the apostle begins to narrow the sphere; for he is about to treat of the priesthood of Christ. He shows us certain that are sanctified, or set

apart. They are therefore spoken of not merely as the seed of Adam, for this would take in the whole human family, but as the seed of *Abraham*. Thus it is a less general class taken as the seed of Abraham, not literally after the flesh, but as it really means, after the Spirit; for none but such are viewed as here sanctified.

Sanctification in the New Testament is not fleshly, as in the Old Testament. If of profession simply, it might be given up by those that take it up of themselves, and are not born of God; but still it is separation to God in the name of Christ. We find persons afterwards spoken of as treating the blood wherewith they were sanctified as an unholy thing. They became apostate, as we know; but as yet He does not contemplate such an issue. He speaks of them as real. "Both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one; for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren." They are His brethren.

In short, then, the priesthood of Christ is in no way a work which looks out to the whole of mankind, as the propitiation of Christ does. That which was represented by the blood on the mercy-seat looked out to all. It was sprinkled on the mercy-seat, and before it. It was not merely a question of those that were in the immediate circle of God's dealings. That blood was too precious, being infinite in its value, to be thus limited. "By the grace of God he tasted death for every man." Indeed, the word may go a little farther, and take in "every *thing*;" but still it includes every man *à fortiori*. As we approach Him in His actions and sufferings and qualifications for priesthood, we find a special regard to those that had an actual relationship of grace. "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took

part of the same ; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil ; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.”

Plainly therefore it is for a delivered people that Christ is viewed as a merciful and faithful high priest—for the sanctified, for the children. “For verily he took not on him the nature of angels.” The real force is, “he does not take up the cause of angels.” It has nothing to do with “nature” here, which was put in very inconsiderately. You will observe some words printed in italics, but others too are ill-rendered. The margin here gives the sense much better—“He taketh not hold of angels ;” that is, He does not espouse their cause, which is the true meaning. “But of the seed of Abraham he taketh hold. Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest.”

It will be seen, then, how this clears the ground distinctly ; for we learn that priesthood follows accomplished redemption, that it supposes the Lord Jesus Himself as He is now, not merely as He was before He came into the world ; for He was not priest then, nor yet, when actually in the world, was He priest then either. When He suffered on the cross, and left the world and went to heaven, He is saluted of God as priest then and there, and this for those who see Him while He is there. We see Jesus, as it is said, crowned with glory and honour. It is for such as see Him by faith. It is an office and function He discharges in heaven, then, for those that are separate from the world, severed unto God ; that is, for the sanctified.

And here by the way let me express the hope that there is nobody here who mistakes the meaning of the

word "sanctified." The point in Hebrews ii. is not at all the thought of a process going on, though I do not the least deny this to be true practically, as it is taught elsewhere. In the practical sense holiness is of course a gradual product of grace—a growth into Christ which always should be going on in the saint; but this passage, and others in Hebrews, look at the class so viewed in the abstract; and what made it also the more striking was, that it was no longer true, as such, of Israel. The Jews alas! had profanely refused as far as they could the Holy One of God. They had treated Him as a reprobate and an impostor. They had lost, therefore, their sanctification, and God treats them as profane. And the sanctified here are those who were separated out of Israel; here, I repeat emphatically, out of Israel; for, as far as the Epistle to the Hebrews speaks, we could scarce prove by it that any Gentiles were being called now. From elsewhere we all know that there are, and the principles in the Epistle to the Hebrews apply to the Gentile believer just as truly as to the Jewish; but the Holy Ghost was tenderly dealing with these men of prejudice, whom He is now instructing in the way more perfectly, and thus leading out from old attachments to the best of blessings. There was solemn warning, but also the desire of love; there was the consideration of such thoughts and feelings as might appear weak, and, no doubt, to a Gentile supremely so. A Gentile would have torn their prejudices to atoms, with rudeness perhaps, certainly without much scruple. But the Spirit of God dealt with the utmost care and gentleness, yet throughout with increasing plainness of speech, until at last the truth has been brought out so fully that they are summoned to quit the camp for Christ outside, bearing His

reproach. There is much to learn in this; and I am sure, my brethren, every one of us needs the lesson.

But still what I am recalling your attention to is this, that the Lord now stands related as priest above to those who are separated to God in the confession of Christ, and separated out of *the* people just as much as out of any other race, yea, pre-eminently here out of that people. For the apostle thus implies that those for whom He is acting were not according to the old sanctification of Israel, but sanctified out of that sanctification which no longer had any validity before God. All now turns on Jesus, the rejected Messiah. He was the sanctifier, as indeed He is God no less than man. "He that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one." "He that sanctifieth" here means Jesus. "He is not ashamed to call them brethren." It is not God, as such, of course; who does not, could not, call any one "brother." It is our Lord who is the sanctifier; and the sanctified are those set apart in His name and by His blood.

Then comes the first allusion to Jesus as priest; we find it at the end of chapter ii. He is "a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God"—not exactly "to make reconciliation." I regret, on such an occasion, to be thus commenting on our common version; but the truth must be spoken, I suppose, and specially on such fundamental and momentous topics as these. It really means propitiation, not "reconciliation." The great day of atonement is alluded to here, and the expiation of sins on it. Reconciliation is a much larger thought than atonement, and means the making good the whole state of the object of it with God. Therefore, although it is founded on propitiation, it goes farther; and so it takes in creation universally, as

we see in Ephesians and Colossians—"all things," not all men, though the blood was shed in view of all, to be testified in due time. Everybody can see for himself that there is no very just sense in saying "making reconciliation for sins." *People* are reconciled; but can we say reconcile *sins*? or make reconciliation for them? *Expiation*, or *propitiation*, for sins is the exact force. And this is what the word does mean. And it is the more striking, as showing the confusion into which people had fallen, that in Romans v. 11, where "atonement" occurs in the English Bible, it ought to be "reconciliation;" while in Hebrews ii., where "reconciliation" occurs, it ought to be "atonement." That is, our translators were unfortunately astray in the very points that the Spirit of God was teaching in both. I do not mention the fact as taking pleasure in detecting flaws of the kind, but simply to vindicate the truth of God, holding that it is of much more consequence for His word to be seen as it is, and for souls to be set right, than merely to keep up an unreal appearance in the version we have in our hands, though heartily admitting that providentially we have abundant reason to bless God for so good a translation. It has its faults, however; and these are two.

It is plain that up to chapter iii. we have the introduction; and, the atonement being brought in, we have hence not merely a priest but the high priest introduced. So in the day of atonement the high priest of Israel appears, and none other. This was a very peculiar action on the day of atonement; and it was the only one of the kind. Atonement was done once for the whole year. It thus set forth completeness (as we can now say, for ever), not a continuous process. The action of the priest or high priest otherwise might be going

through all the year round; but not the atonement, which was distinct, unique, and absolutely settled for that circle of time. The high priest on this occasion represented the people, and offered that on which Jehovah's lot fell for the sins of the people, bringing its blood within the veil, and doing with that blood as he did with the bullock's, and thus making atonement, because of the uncleanness of the children of Israel, and because of their transgressions in all their sins. After he came out from the most holy place he laid his hands upon the live goat, and confessed over him all their iniquities, and all their transgressions in all their sins. The whole was wound up by sending the goat Azazel into the wilderness, as the figure of sins thus borne away.

Thus two goats, in fact, were needed to complete atonement, the formal and particular confession being upon the scapegoat or people's lot. Still they were both involved for the type of atonement in its two great parts, the vindicating of God, which was the first thought, and next the allied comfort of knowing that all evil on the part of the people was minutely brought out, laid upon that goat, and discharged to be seen no more. And these two truths are distinctly before us in Rom. iii. and iv.; chapter iii. answering more to Jehovah's lot, chapter iv. to the people's lot, the latter part of both chapters. In the one case it is God just and justifying him that believes in Jesus; and there we have the blood on the mercy-seat. In the other, Christ is said to be delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification, which delivering of Him up for our offences is exactly what the scapegoat figured when sent away with their sins over his head.

Azazel does not answer to the resurrection part.

There is no type of this in the offerings here, though we find it in that of Isaac. (Gen. xxii.) There was also a figure of it in the bird that was let loose, dipped in the blood of the killed one, for 'the leper; but it is not so with the live goat. For it was to be sent into a land not inhabited; and heaven is anything but that. It is a place already well inhabited, and will be so yet more for ever. Impossible for it to be symbolised by the desert scene into which the goat was sent. What this was intended to set forth was the dismissal of Israel's sin, the visible testimony to all their offences—their positive acts of transgression—borne away. This seems to be all that was meant by it, the evident complement therefore of Jehovah's lot, as it was the people's. Substitution appears no less than expiation.

Atonement, however, though by the high priest alone, does not, strictly speaking, give us the proper ordinary action of priesthood, but the foundation, and hence is intimately connected with it. The purging of, or making expiation for, sins was a prime necessity, but still a foundation for the priest to appear before God day by day on behalf of the people.

We come now to another matter of the deepest interest in the person that could fittingly act as priest. "In that he himself suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted." Let us weigh it the more because it so clearly concerns, not merely ourselves, but Himself, so often wounded in the house of His friends, as well as by heartless enemies. It is not only the person in both parts, or the foundation work for us, but the gracious provision in His heart, as man tried in every possible way, that He might thus the better succour those that are tempted.

What is meant by the word "tempted"? As you may have observed, not a word is said about temptation till we hear of the sanctified people. "Tempted" in these cases, then, has no allusion whatever to the inward solicitations of evil. Such is not the thought: it should be needless to say the Lord never had any. But even where priesthood is spoken of on our behalf, it is remarkable that by it God does not make provision for sins or failures. So we see in chap. iv., where we learn not a little more. "Seeing then that we have a great high priest that is passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin."

Here the introduction of the word "*yet*" into the clause (printed in italics) is a very great blemish, calculated to ruin the sense. If you read it without that addition, you may apprehend what the Holy Ghost means a great deal more distinctly and correctly. As it stands now in the Authorised Version (and I fear in the mind of the translators, certainly of many individuals in our own day), the deduction is that the Lord was tempted, but never yielded, never sinned. This is not at all the point. The Holy Spirit was teaching quite another truth, more worthy of Christ's glory, and needed by the believer. Of course, it is true that Christ never did sin; but it is far below the truth here intended. What is revealed goes a great deal farther.

Christ "was tempted in all points like as we are, *apart from sin.*" *He* had no sin whatever. It was not only that He never sinned, but He had no sin; and this makes all the difference possible. He was the Holy One, and this was manifested, especially in the unpar-

alleled temptations He endured. Assuredly He was all through the Holy One; but it was all apart from sin. In Him was no sin—not sins merely, but sin. It was not only that He did not yield to sin, but there was no sin there to yield. His nature as man had no evil to be acted on by the devil. There was evil without. He was assailed by every possible, the most subtle, effort of Satan in a ruined and wretched world. There was all that could give pain, not only in men and the Jews, but even in disciples. There was the presenting of what was agreeable to allure at the beginning of His path; there was the endeavour to alarm at the end by what was most tremendous and overwhelming in death, and, above all, in such a death as was before Him.

But whether it was by the pleasant or the painful, at every time, under all circumstances, Christ was tempted like as we are. It is not said that He was not tempted more. "There hath no temptation befallen us but that which is common to man," *i.e.* a human one. Could one say this about Jesus? Who does not see that the Lord was tempted above all that man was ever tempted? that there was no temptation to compare with His? While, therefore, it is perfectly true that He was "tempted in all points like as we are," it is far from being true, as many ill-instructed souls assume, that we have been tempted in all points like as He was.

The wilderness was the marked scene of Christ's characteristic temptation. Have we been ever tried so? Certainly not. There may be a measure of analogy, and I have no doubt that the three well-known temptations which closed the sojourn in the wilderness are full of instruction in their principle at least. Each one

of the three efforts of Satan against the Lord—the natural temptation to make the stones loaves, the worldly temptation in the offer of the kingdoms of the world on the condition of homage, and the religious temptation in the exhortation to cast Himself down from the pinnacle of the temple according to the promise in Psalm xci.—is full of the weightiest instruction and warning for our souls. But then be it remembered, that before that He had been tempted for forty days without food. Is this a trial that we have ever been subjected to? We may boldly say, I think, that it is one into which the Spirit will never lead us as Him. It was a trial altogether peculiar, and suited to the Son of God, the man Christ Jesus.

While, therefore, our Lord Jesus here below was tempted like as we are in all points, He was tempted in a most important way that was altogether proper to Himself. And it was meet that it should be so; for He was not what I may call a merely natural member or natural head of the human family. Most truly a man He became, by grace made of a woman; but in His own right God, and the Son of God. And soon He was about to take the place of head of the new creation. He was to be the counterpart of the first man—as he in sin, so the Second in righteousness and grace; and just as Adam fell in a place that was peculiar to him in a small way, so the Lord Jesus stood under incomparably more severe temptations, and is now the glorified man in resurrection, as the other brought in death for himself and his race. Thus Adam's case, here briefly sketched, helps, or ought to help, any soul that wants to know what temptation is; for the common notion that temptation supposes inward evil is a fatal mistake, and shows that there is a leaven of unsuspected heterodoxy

in all who think so, and thereby fail to conceive of temptation apart from proclivity or tendency to sin. One need not do more than just ask the simple questions, Was not Adam tempted? and what was his condition when tempted? Certainly there was no sin, no inward proclivity to evil, in Adam before he fell. Sin therefore is in no way necessary to temptation in the sense of the word here meant; for the first great instance of temptation, and alas! of sin, was the case of a man who was made without sin. So here; so with the Son of God who conquered Satan, the destined extirpator of sin, and this too not by power but by suffering, that it might be by righteousness, and so grace have all its blessed way for and with our souls. How gloriously, here on earth morally, now in fact on high, was not our Lord Jesus the counterpart of that first man, Himself the second man, and last Adam!

I affirm, then, that He, absolutely without sin, was therefore the very and only One that could be a fit object for temptation on the part of Satan. The enemy's aim was to get sin in; but no, even at the very close, the prince of this world came and found nothing in Him. There was neither sin inwardly to excite, nor was there lack of dependence on God which admitted sin. It was not there, nor could it ever find entrance by independence of God. If Satan had only contrived to lead Him to use His own will, there had been sin at once, and all was ruined, every hope gone. It could not be indeed; for He was both a divine person and the dependent, obedient man. The foe was utterly foiled. And there is the great mistake—that many reason from themselves to Him, and conceive it was a kind of virtue or merit in the Lord Jesus that He never sinned. Whereas there never was a question about His sinning,

either to God or even to any man who believed in Him.

How could any one born of God entertain for one moment the thought of the Lord Jesus failing? Could such a profane dreamer be really supposed to believe that He is the Son of God? All these speculations of men which lower the glory of Jesus simply show that they do not really believe that Jesus is God while a man. They do not know what they mean by such a confession as that He is the Son of God to be honoured as the Father. They do not truly believe that He is God Himself as truly as the Father or the Holy Ghost; for His becoming a man detracted nothing from it. He took manhood into union with His deity; but the incarnation in no way lowered the deity, while it raised humanity in His person into union with God. Each nature, however, preserved its own properties. There was no confusion. Each was exactly what it was—human nature, and divine nature, each in all its own characteristic excellence, combined, not confounded, in His person. And such was Jesus, who came to glorify His God and Father, and deliver us from our sins to His glory by redemption through His blood.

And such is the priest we have before God. Hence we see the great force of the words, "In that he himself suffered, being tempted." Truly He suffered. Where you yield to evil, you do not suffer when you are tempted. When there is only evil, it is yielded to. Evil is gratified by its own exercise. The sinner does his own will, pleasing himself without the fear of God. This is sin—the indulgence of one's own will or lawlessness, than which nothing is more pleasant to any ungodly one. This the Lord never did, never wished, never wavered about for an instant; and this is what we

find throughout the whole of His course. "Lo, I come to do thy will, O God." So it was before; so it was at the end; so all through. He was the doer of God's will —of all things, to my mind, the most astonishing in the Lord Jesus regarded as God's servant here below. He never did, never once, His own will; He always did or suffered the will of God. It was the perfection of man morally. No miracles, no deeds of power, can be compared with it. God could work wonders by a worm, as He has often wrought by the merest sinners. But there never was that only did the will of God except One; and He was the One therefore that was called to suffer as no one else could; for it is just in proportion to love and holiness that one suffers, not to speak of His intrinsic glory.

Just so with a child of God now. You refuse to do your own will. Assuredly it costs no trifle to cleave to God's will in a world where nothing else is done but man's; for the world lives, moves, and has its being in seeking its own will. The Lord Jesus was just the contrary, and so those that are of Him, the sanctified. For this indeed they are, as the apostle Peter teaches, "Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ." This, I believe, goes very far too, as it means the same kind of obedience as the Lord's; for He here below never obeyed in a single instance as under compulsion or resisting an influence within that was opposed to the will of God. He suffered; but the suffering was because of Satan's devices against Him who always pleased God, refusing absolutely and always to swerve from obedience, besides the holy horror of His soul, not at evil within, because there was none, but at evil everywhere else out-

side Himself. The suggestions too of the enemy, instead of awakening will, only inflicted pain and suffering on Him. He was a sufferer just because He was the Holy One, not in the least degree (as with us) from the sense of the mind of flesh; and therefore it is said, "In that he himself suffered, being tempted." When man as he yields in anything, it is of course to gratify his nature; it is self-pleasing, whatever be the bitter result. There neither was nor could be aught like this in Jesus. He "suffered, being tempted," and He is "able to succour them that are tempted." But the remarkable thing to note here is, that an obedience similar to His is looked for from us: to obey God as sons in the new nature, and by the Spirit of God. In this path there is trial.

In exact accordance are Christians viewed here below in the Epistle to the Hebrews. They are redeemed; they are sanctified; they are children; they are Christ's brethren; and meanwhile they are in the place of temptation, which the wilderness is and must be. So we find the Psalmist reminding the children of Israel of "the day of temptation in the wilderness." For us too now, as for them, there is the substantially same trial. The scene around is the wilderness, the time is the day of temptation. We are tried and thoroughly put to the proof. And this our God turns to our good; for we are in a place too where every spring of power, all the food that sustains, the light, the direction that guides, is from above, not from within ourselves, nor from the world without of course. There is nothing here around us, any more than in our own old nature, to help us on; but just the contrary, to impede and defile, to injure and destroy. Above the rest in malice is the great enemy that tempts to evil. Christ' knows it, having His wakeful eye on him as well as on us. As the

general, who once in a beleaguered city had to stand and beat off the enemy, though he suffered, is just the one most of all to feel for his friends, who, being besieged by the same foe, have besides to contend with a traitor within: how much more cannot Jesus feel for you and sympathize with you? Never was a greater mistake than the supposition that He must have the traitorous old man within in order to sympathize. Had there been evil within Him, it would simply have destroyed the person of Christ in His moral glory and perfection, as well as His sacrifice and its consequences. There would have been no Saviour at all. This is what unbelief ever comes to—a virtual denial of Jesus, the Son and His work. And hence, therefore, it matters but little whether men deny His Godhead or undermine His spotless and perfect humanity: either way, no Christ remains for God, no Saviour remains for man. It is the merest naturalism to imagine that the perfectness of the Saviour and of His salvation takes away from the perfectness of His sympathy. Love and holiness in our nature tried here below, and suffering to the utmost, are the basis of His sympathy; and He, if I may repeat, that knew what it was to suffer in having to do with the tempter, knows best how to feel for you who, besides the same tempter, have to watch against traitorous flesh within you. If He had it not, does He therefore care for you the less? Nay, but the more and perfectly; for the old man occupies one with self in one way or another: He was absolutely free to love, serve, and suffer.

But then the succour that the Lord renders is to holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling. They are "the sanctified." The priesthood of Christ applies itself only to saints. This is so true that we never find the

slightest raising of the question of sins when Christ's priesthood is discussed by the apostle. It is a common enough thought among believers that Christ acts as a priest for us when we fail by sins from time to time. This you will not find in Scripture. The teaching of the epistle applies His priesthood to succour and sympathy when we are tempted as Christ was; and I have no doubt there was the holiest wisdom in this.

Another opportunity I hope to have for showing what is an admirable and gracious provision for us, whatever may be the depth of our need in failure. We shall then see that, if a believer sin, his sad case is not overlooked, but that God does in His own most merciful and wise goodness provide for it, whatever the want may be.

But your attention is now drawn to the first great truth, which, believe me, ought to be gravely weighed; for not the least unhappy feature of modern Christendom is this, that people have imbibed the notion that we must sin, and that there is no adequate help or power against it. They are apt therefore to regard sin as a small, or at least inevitable, matter, making up their minds for it because we are only "poor sinners:" such is the language constantly adopted, and by evangelicals pre-eminently, whether Anglicans or dissenters.

Now, I do not deny that the Christian may be viewed as a sinner, yea, as the chief, looking back at what one had been, or at what one is in oneself apart from Christ—as the apostle Paul speaks of himself in 1 Tim. i. But surely he did not mean that he was then going on in his sins? or in constant failures as a believer? This is the way many people use it; and I grieve to think that the object desired is to reduce the holy apostle to their own level as much as possible. Sad to say, they would like to get a license for a little sin out of the Bible. Hence,

one party try to make sin only a violation of known law; others take advantage of the middle portion of Romans vii., and the ineffectual struggle against sin there described in a quickened but undelivered soul, as if it were the ordinary and normal state of a Christian here below. What can I call this but Antinomianism? And yet you will find that these evil thoughts reign most with a great many persons who think themselves the most opposed to Antinomians. But there is no one thing more remarkable in the present confusion than the fact that the very people who most fail take credit for what they least possess, and bandy charges against those too who, through the mercy of God, seek to be as far as possible from affording ground for them.

It is, however, the truth now, that throughout Christendom theology limits sin to flagrant, or at any rate overt, acts of transgression, and teaches men that, human nature being what it is, there must needs be sin on the part of Christians; and one reason of this Christ-dishonouring result is very plain. They agree in general to put themselves under the law as the rule of life. Now, as surely as the flesh is in us, it is utterly impossible that the law should not provoke those under it to sin. Nay, it was what the law was given for. It is not meant to make men sinners, which God could not do, but, when they were sinners, to make the sin evident, and to bring it out unmistakeably. In a certain sense the object was wholesome and merciful in the result, because it was to hinder people from deceiving themselves. It was directly calculated to guard those that had sinned, and really were guilty before God, from being able to gloss over their sins and pretend they had none. It was to prove them distinctly obnoxious to judgment, and to make them cry out to God for mercy,

glad to find the free grace that God has provided in the Lord Jesus Christ and by His redemption.

Such a process it pleased God to carry on before the Saviour came, preparing the way for Him and His work in this as in other respects. But then it is another thing altogether now that He is come, and the grace and truth of God in all its fulness, and the redemption that Christ has accomplished. It is a totally different thing to go back from the gospel and put oneself in that condition of law in which souls necessarily were before, in order to make them feel the impossibility of law availing them and their need of grace in Christ. If it was in due season then, it is unbelief now, when God's word entitles the believer to the enjoyment of what He has wrought and of what He is. Law is not enacted for a righteous man (which and more the believer surely is), but for lawless and insubordinate souls, for impious and sinful (which believers are not); as, on the other hand, the right and intended use of the saving grace of God is to teach us, that, having denied impiety and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, and justly, and piously in the present age (or course of things), awaiting the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ. By grace, therefore, the soul is put as absolutely clean by virtue of Christ's redemption before God, once utterly guilty and lost, but now without a charge on His part.

What more do I want? That the same Saviour who died and rose for me should be now living and active on my behalf in all the gracious exercise of His watchful, loving, holy care, succouring me in the midst of my trials for His name's sake, and from man's, the world's, and Satan's hatred. He is in the glory, and I am in the wilderness, going on, toiling, suffering, but awaiting Him

to come and take me to Himself in that glory whither He is gone. For the present I am here. He was crucified, and, while here, exposed to His various enemies, not only to their malicious power, but to the serpent's wiles. And who and what am I to stand or march through? It is here that priesthood applies to saints, and for such ends. It is to minister to them the suited succour, that we may receive mercy and find grace for seasonable help. It is from One, too, who knows all by His own experience in depths beyond comparison; who knows what an enemy Satan is, and how great his subtilty and his malice; from One therefore not only as divine, but that can succour on the ground of being once tried to the uttermost Himself as man, but then One who is priest as Son of God, and not merely because He has that nature which I have, although I have it in a fallen unholy state which He had not. I have humanity tainted: He was and is the Holy One, not only as God, but as man. Certainly, however, this is no reason why He should not sympathize, but the contrary. For it is selfishness and sin which hinder sympathy, not holiness and love.

But we are told "we have not a high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities." Mark, the apostle does not speak about our sins; nor is there any ground whatever to confound "infirmities" with sins. He supposes a people that have now done with their sins by the grace of God, because by the blood of Christ they are blotted out for ever. They are set, therefore, with their faces Godward and heavenward; but still they are in the wilderness. And above is the Lord Jesus in all His active love and grace occupied with them individually, and able to sympathize with our infirmities, as One tempted in all things in like

manner apart from sin. No doubt one of the sources which commonly pervert the character of Christ's priesthood is from looking in a natural way to our Lord Jesus. Men can not make out how He can be dealing with every one at once according to His word. But this is a simple matter of faith. The word of God is as plain about the suited care of the Lord Jesus in His priestly office, as about the efficacy of His redemption for each believer. And as to the total absence of sin, there is exactly the same phrase used for the one case as for the other, as displayed in salvation when He appears a second time. (Compare Hebrews iv. 15 with chapter ix. 28.)

Accordingly it is in this way that the Holy Ghost treats it. "Having therefore a great high priest who hath passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast the profession." For therein lay the difficulty. Their peril was lest they should compromise Christ Jesus or go back. The apostle never hints at the danger of assurance, but insists on holding it firm to the end. That they should doubt the forgiveness of their sins does not occur to the Spirit of God, if I may so speak. Beyond controversy He could not treat the work of Christ with such contempt as to raise the question whether it does not absolutely effect the end for which God had given Him to die. Rather does He call on the children to hold fast the boldness and the boast of hope firm to the end, resting on their simplicity, which is their wisdom, on the fulness of divine grace in Christ. It is for this very reason they in their trials want sympathy, as well as to be helped and strengthened; and the priesthood of Christ does this for the holy brethren.

It is not a question here of meeting unholy men, and

pardoning those who are taught of God to cry to Him about their sins and ruin. This is the gospel of God's grace found elsewhere, but not here. It is not the point in priesthood, but rather "let us hold fast the confession." Christ was in all points tempted like as we are, without sin. It is not merely without *sinning*, but "without *sin*:" temptation in His case was absolutely apart from sin. "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."

In the next chapter (v.) this is pursued, and in a manner full of importance and interest, although men often overlook it. "For every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things pertaining to God." This they apply to the Lord Jesus. "Well," you ask, "was He not taken from among men?" I answer that the Holy Spirit is not giving this as a description of His priesthood at all, but of priesthood in contrast with His. "For every high priest taken from among men is established for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins; who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way; for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity. And by reason hereof he ought, as for the people, so also for himself, to offer for sins." The third verse ought to make it indisputably plain to any believer. The same high priest of the first two verses is described in the third verse also; and he expressly requires to offer for himself—not merely for others, but also for his own need—to offer for sins. Is it not obvious, then, that it is such a high priest as Aaron, or Aaron's son, not such an one as Christ, who, if compared, is accordingly also contrasted with that description? "And no man taketh this honour unto himself, but he

that is called by God, as was Aaron also. So also Christ glorified not himself." He begins with a point of similarity, but it is only to bring out contrast. He did not take it to Himself. He who said to Him, Thou art My Son, said also elsewhere, A priest Thou for ever after the order of Melchisedec. He was addressed by God accordingly. Thus the essence of our Lord's priesthood here, where the root, stock, and fruits are all before us, is this, that He was not merely Son of man, but the Son of God. Most blessed to see, that being Son of God He deigned to become a man, the Son of man; but the ground laid down is what He is essentially in His own right and title, not merely what He *became*, but what He *is*, the Son of God, as none else was of men or angels. The high priest, with which chapter v. opens, is merely a child of Adam like another, who could exercise forbearance toward the ignorant and erring, because he was no better himself. He was himself also clothed with infirmity. It was but natural therefore that he on this ground should feel for his fellows. But all this is exactly in contrast with the place, and dignity, and grace of the Lord as priest.

The priesthood of Christ is in relation to the trials of those who are His, loved in the world and unto the end. It is for the succour of them when tempted, as He was, when suffering for righteousness' or for His name's sake—tried in every way in which they can be here below, unless it be because of their sins. There may be, and is, pity even there; and God's grace may mercifully come down to such need, and deal with one who is buffeted for his faults. He knew too well that it would be all over with us if it were not so; but it is not what the Spirit of God treats of here. Now this is of all possible consequence for us to be clear about. For

we must never put a strain on Scripture. Although the teaching might, if introduced here, seem more compact to one's mind and wishes, and a shorter road to comfort thus open to the children of God if they looked on the priesthood of our Lord Jesus Christ as dealing with our faults and applying itself in grace to sins; still the path of faith is to read the Bible as God has written it, and the only real power and comfort of the Spirit will be found to accompany subjection to His word.

It will be my business, if the Lord will, when we next assemble for the purpose, to take up the other part of my subject, the provision of grace, not for the weakness of the children of God, nor for their sufferings from the enemy, but when alas! through unguardedness they have been drawn away or slipped into evil, into sin. I shall show that the grace of the Lord Jesus can meet this as every other difficulty. But the sympathy of the Lord could not be with our evil. We can only dwell on this for a moment now.

When we were nothing but sinners, it was not a question of sympathy or of priesthood consequently, but of suffering for sins, as He alone suffered. This was what we wanted, not sympathy for our sins. No right-minded person, no saint of God, could want sympathy with his sins. Suffering for us, the just for the unjust, blotting them out with the precious blood of Jesus, was the way in which God met that need, and met it conclusively. But they being made now a new creation in Christ, washed not only in blood but also in water by the word (for this is He that came by water and blood, Jesus the Christ, not by water only, but by water and blood), both atoned for and already clean by reason of the word He had spoken to them—being thus on every side and in the fullest sense holy and beloved,

then they want and find One that succours in all trials, difficulties, sorrows, and sufferings that befall saints here for His sake.

This is exactly what the Lord is doing for us now, occupied with each believer; for the very point of the blessedness in it is that it is *individual*. He is not priest for the church: I know no such doctrine in Scripture. Nor is it even for an individual viewed as a member of His body, though of course the Christian is such. But if one think of oneself as a member of Christ's body, then is to be seen only what is absolutely perfect, what is truly of the Holy Ghost. But then I am exposed to the enemy in this world; I am passing through a howling wilderness, a pilgrim and a stranger. There is exactly where I want and where I have the grace of Christ's priesthood.

The children of Israel, it will be remembered, when they were journeying through the wilderness, brought out in a humbling but instructive way the presumption of man, though altogether vanity. They thought one was as good as another; for they were all a holy people, and therefore needed no priest given them by God. The consequence was that a plague set in, and the earth opened her mouth, Jehovah's judgment swallowing up those rebels against His authority. But immediately afterwards they are taught in the most significant way the all-importance of priesthood. He directs the heads of the families to put a rod for each tribe in the sanctuary. Aaron does the same. When looked at in due time, Aaron's alone buds, blossoms, and bears fruit. That rod of the high priest accordingly becomes the characteristic of the chosen priesthood. There could not but be authority, nor could a saint wish otherwise; for God, not man, must command. But it was not the

judicial authority of Moses's rod. It was not a rod marked by judgments executed on wickedness. Such was the well-known rod of Moses, which would have only brought destruction on such a people as the Israelites were; for, after all, how often they were breaking down! There we find this wonderful thought, the rod of grace, of priestly grace, the rod of living power—of the life that was after death, and that bears fruit in the face of it. And so the Lord in this significant way showed that the way to lead such a people through the wilderness was not to be by such an act of delivering power as brought them out of Egypt. This would not suffice for Him or them. Thus had they been by mighty hand led into the wilderness, but what could bring them through the wilderness? The grace of priesthood, in the figure of the power of an endless life, which bears fruit out of death, as set forth by the wonderful token of it thenceforward laid up in the holiest of all, at least in the desert—Aaron's rod that budded.

So we see in our Lord Jesus, as we read in Heb. vii., set forth in all the precision and fulness of inspired teaching: "He is able also to save to the uttermost those that come unto God by him." He saves them completely. How could the Son of God fail as priest any more than as Saviour, or in any other way whatever? It is not here a question of the redemption of slaves, but of His saving the saints of God, of bringing them safe through in presence of a power opposing itself to God's purpose about them, and from all the consequences of their weakness here below. He is always living to make intercession for them. But they are associated with One who was "holy, harmless, undefiled." There is no allowance of sin, and least of all by priesthood—no such thought as a company of

sinner who have a priest that takes care of them in spite of their sins. Such is not the doctrine of Christ's priesthood. They are holy, for God is who has begotten them again to a living hope by Christ's resurrection from the dead. They are consequently not born of God only, but sufferers here below while He is on high, where as priest He is always living to make intercession for them.

Undoubtedly, in spite of such great mercy and privileges, they may, through unwatchfulness, sin; and it remains to be shown that they are not left to perish in the folly of an evil way into which they were surprised. We shall see how God meets all this, and that it is in a somewhat different manner, though it be by the same Christ. But it is Christ in a way suited to that need in His wondrous grace. Enough has been now pointed out from Scripture, I trust, to clear the subject of Christ's priesthood for the Christian: this was all I proposed for the present.



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