

The Eternal Priest

“Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek” (Hebrews 5:6).

“For this Melchizedek, King of Salem, priest of the Most High God, who met Abraham, while he was returning from the smiting of the kings, and he blessed him [Abraham] to whom also Abraham divided a tenth of all things; first by interpretation King of Righteousness [Melchizedek] and then King of Salem, which is King of Peace. Without father, without mother without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, having resemblance to the Son of God, remains a priest forever” (Hebrews 7:1-3).

The priesthood of Christ is forever. That is the only kind of priesthood that is worthy of God. But why would we need a priest forever? Because we are forever other than God, even though we bear His image and likeness. We are truly one with the Father in our Spirits, but we have that oneness everlastingly through Christ, who mediated the Spirit of God to our spirits. In His intercessory prayer recorded in John 17, Christ prays that “they may be one in us.” We are only one with God because we are in Christ and Christ is in us. With an everlasting identity through the Eternal Priesthood of Christ, the essential nature of our being is spirit and not flesh, and eternal, not temporal. Understanding this major truth, should affect the perception that we have of our lives here on the earth.

The issue of Melchizedek, which we dealt with briefly in a previous article on the priesthood, is of such vital importance that it seemed necessary to go into it in a little more depth, in this series which has come primarily from the book of Hebrews.

It is very difficult for us, with our human minds, to grasp the meaning of the Deity. We possess the truth of Christ in our spirits, as we possess Christ in our spirits, but this truth is too far beyond the capacity of the human mind to articulate it. Nor is it always necessary to do so. Our lives are affected by the truth that is within us, even when we do not always understand in our minds. Thus, it is often true that when we hear the Word of God we may not fully comprehend it with our minds, but our spirits are nourished. In fact, the fundamental essence of our relationship to God is a Spirit to spirit communication with God, which actually bypasses our human thought processes. This, of course, is what Paul meant when he said that he prayed, sometimes, in the spirit and sometimes with the understanding. Whether Paul was praying in a private “tongues” experience as in I Corinthians 14, or without a vocal expression, as in Romans 8:26, he was, in either case, communicating with God in a spirit to spirit communion. Much of our interaction with God through the day is of this “spirit” nature. And so it will be throughout the reaches of eternity, where our communion will no longer be hindered by the human or fleshly thought processes. *“Then shall we know, even as also we are known”* (I Corinthians 13). Even then, inasmuch as we are still other than God himself, although partaking of His nature and integrally united with Him, we will still need a mediator between ourselves and the ultimate Deity, and that Mediator will be Christ, the Eternal High Priest.

Thus it is that our essential nature and relationship to God is a “spirit” one and functions beyond the capacities of the human mind. Nevertheless, it is important and necessary for us to function on the earth with the human thought processes. While much of our interaction with God does go on in the spirit, we, as presently “earth-bound,” are confined to the earthly medium of thought and action. The flesh, or human nature, including both mind and body, serves presently as the vessel through which God does, in fact, express Himself to His creatures on the earth. Our minds do, in fact, come to the knowledge of God. And, we are enjoined to do so in order to grow and to function on the earth. (See Colossians 1). But how can we attain such knowledge? Of course, the Holy Spirit gives us the help that we need both by the written revelation that He has given us and through the daily experiences that we have on the earth as His children. But, of course, as long as we are on the earth we do “see through the glass darkly.” As Paul indicated in I Corinthians 13, we are still “children” as far as our understanding is concerned.

So then how can we be sure of our knowledge? That is a very large question. In many respects, the church has failed to grasp the reality of this problem. That is one of the reasons why the church is fragmented so excessively today. The leaders and teachers have failed to understand that their knowledge of God and of the Bible is subject to human limitations. That is not to say that we cannot have the truth. But, the truth that we have, while accurate as far as it goes, is nevertheless **“in part and not the whole.”** Therefore we must be careful about the way in which we handle that truth, not assuming that any of us have the ultimate knowledge of things. We ought to be charitable to one another in our mutual quest for the truth. We know enough of God and His revelation to us to function on the earth with surety. He has seen to it that we have enough knowledge to do that. But many of the theological questions that have troubled the church for centuries are not clearly enough revealed for anyone to make absolute statements about them. It ought to be understood that if even the most devout and knowledgeable cannot agree on these matters, it must be that they are as yet imperfectly revealed to us. The church can certainly enjoy a great deal of unity on the many subjects that are our common heritage—as, for instance, the fact that God has revealed Himself to us in a written revelation; the facts of the Deity of Christ and His redemptive process in the world; as well as the eternal unity that we have with God through His Spirit. There are a great many things that the believers can agree on, and these should be the grounds of their unity. They do not have to agree on many of the theological issues, but they can grant to one another the right of variant opinions.

Having said all of this, and with these conditions, how then do we know what we do know about God? Fundamentally, we learn of God, not through propositions or statements about Him, but through what we can piece together by vignettes or illustrations of God’s dealings with His creation over eons of its existence. A vignette is really a partial picture, and that is what we accumulate—a large number of pieces to the puzzle like vignettes, giving us an ever increasing understanding of Him. The Bible is full of such vignettes. One of these is of course the story of Melchizedek.

The first appearance of Melchizedek in the Bible was to Abraham, as related in Genesis 14. In the early days of Abraham’s settling of the land of Palestine, his nephew (or so we suppose) Lot, was taken captive in a skirmish with certain Middle Eastern Potentates. Abraham raised a small army from his servants and

rescued Lot, thoroughly vanquishing the enemy. On his return, he met this most mysterious figure—Melchizedek, High Priest of Salem (presumed by many to be ancient Jerusalem). Abraham instantly recognized the greatness of this figure, although there is no evidence that he had previous knowledge of him. According to an ancient custom, Abraham gave to this figure a tenth of all his spoils of war, thus acknowledging his greatness. Melchizedek brought forth bread and wine, which, most certainly, was a symbol of the future communion which Christ would enjoin upon His disciples. There is no mention, whatsoever, of Melchizedek's origin or future destiny. The author of the Hebrews makes a very important point of these facts, thereby verifying the eternality of Melchizedek. He also makes a point of the meaning of Melchizedek's name and the place of his priesthood. The name Melchizedek is from two Hebrew words—*Melek* and *Zedek*. *Melek* means “king,” and *Zedek* means “righteousness.” Salem is from the Hebrew word *Shalom*, which means “peace” Thus, as Hebrews tells us, this figure, Melchizedek, was seen as King of Righteousness and King of Peace. Everywhere in the Scripture, Christ is seen as both our Peace and our Righteousness.

There is very little doubt in the mind of most Bible scholars that this figure, Melchizedek was what we call a “preincarnate” appearance of Christ himself. Thus we have, in the episode of Abraham and Melchizedek, one of these vignettes which gives us a very Important insight into the nature of Christ, and our relationship to Him and to the Father. In the interpretation of the Bible, there are often efforts to put one's own symbolism into the various episodes. This can be very misleading, unless we have a very certain word of the scripture itself. The Bible is its own best interpreter. In the matter of Melchizedek, we have an outstanding example of bonafide interpretation of the episode, without resorting to human symbolism's. It is with great confidence, then, that we declare that Christ was at work in the world as the agent of God, from the beginning of creation, long before the incarnation itself. And, most importantly, is the truth of the eternal nature of the priesthood of Christ. We also know from the incident that no matter what happens in the world in the course of its human history, ultimately, Christ will reign as the King of Peace and the King of Righteousness. This is truly a most comforting thought.

As regards our own personal relationship to Christ, this marvelous truth about Melchizedek should govern our perspective on the world and, on our lives, and vitalize our interactions with Christ who is our Eternal High Priest. **“LET US THEREFORE COME BOLDLY TO THE THRONE OF GRACE.”**

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