

Westminster Larger Catechism

Question 44

Halifax, 13 July 2008

Q. 44 How doth Christ execute the office of a priest?

A. Christ executeth the office of a priest, in His once offering himself a sacrifice without spot to God, to be a reconciliation for the sins of His people; and in making continual intercession for them.

Introduction:

- The names, titles, and offices of Christ...
- We have seen the name Jesus...
- And the name Christ (anointed one, Messiah).
- Last week, we saw that Christ as prophet is both the message and the messenger.
- This week, we shall see that Christ as priest is both the offering and the offerer.

Scripture Reading: Hebrews 7

I. A priest's function is laid out for us in the Old Testament

A. We understand Christ as priest by looking at the Old Testament service.

1. God appointed priests so that we could look at the work they were called to do and understand the work of Christ.
 - They were, in a sense, His representatives to show what God required of sinners.
 - At first, each head of household offered sacrifices...
 - Then as society became more complex, men were set apart to the task.
 - There were priests before Aaron as well, such as Jethro, the priest of Midian, and Melchisedec, priest of Salem.
 - When God wanted to show the work of the priesthood more accurately, He gave the pattern to Moses...
 - **Hebrews 8:4-5: There are priests who offer the gifts according to the law; who serve the copy and shadow of the heavenly things, as Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make the tabernacle. For He said, "See *that* you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain."**
2. What is the work that priests were called to do?

- a. The priests were appointed to offer sacrifices for sin.
 - **Heb 5:1: For every high priest taken from among men is appointed for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins.**
 - Most world religions have priests that do this because from the beginning,
 - God revealed Himself as a God who must be propitiated because of human sin.
 - Although as men's hearts become more callous,
 - the idea of making offerings for sin often got perverted into the notion of "feeding the deity" (give him a cow so he will give you rain), it is still a witness to the original institution of God in the beginning.

 - b. A second function of the priest was to intercede for the people.
 - He prays for the people, which prayers were demonstrated by the burning of incense.
 - **Ex 30:7-9 "Aaron shall burn on it sweet incense every morning; when he tends the lamps, he shall burn incense on it. And when Aaron lights the lamps at twilight, he shall burn incense on it, a perpetual incense before the LORD throughout your generations. You shall not offer strange incense on it, or a burnt offering, or a grain offering; nor shall you pour a drink offering on it."**
 - Without intercession, there is no forgiveness.
 - Ps 106:23: Therefore He said that He would destroy them, had not Moses His chosen one stood before Him in the breach, to turn away His wrath, lest He destroy *them*.

 - c. A third function of the priest was to bless the people
 - **Numbers 6:22-27: And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: "Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, 'This is the way you shall bless the children of Israel. Say to them: "The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make His face shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace." ' "** So they shall put My name on the children of Israel, and I will bless them."
 - This is the way God assures His people, by the priest who represents Him, that they are accepted by Him and can expect His blessing upon them.
- B. We also learn about the offerings themselves from the Old Testament.
- Leviticus 1-6 presents the offerings to us...
1. Lev. 1 is the burnt offering
 - Key characteristic: completely consumed.

- Laid hands on, to show that it is required of us to be completely dedicated to God—our whole life...
 - Dt. 6: Love God with all your heart...
 - Be perfect as your Father in Heaven is perfect
2. Lev 2 is the grain offering
- Key characteristic: accompanied the burnt offering or the peace offering
 - It always had to be jointed to these other offerings because it was not an atonement, or a substitution...
 - Instead, it demonstrated the consecration of the worshipper's possessions to God,
 - and thanksgiving for His provision.
 - All our service to God (use of gifts, the fruit of our labour) is only acceptable to God through Christ.
 - As it says in Proverbs, even the ploughing of the wicked is sin—even the good things that people do if they are not in Christ are sinful because they are offered without an atonement.
 - That is why it is offered with other offerings.
3. Lev. 3 is the peace offering
- Key characteristic: shared between God, the priest, and the worshipper (with his family and guests)
 - The worshipper would lay his hands on the sacrifice to show that it was a substitution; and there was the sprinkling of blood to show that it was an atonement.
 - Meaning: we have fellowship with God and His Son (the priest) and with each other...
 - The thing we share is Christ (God delights in Him, we delight in Him)
 - The peace offering is more than an end to hostility—
 - It is the receiving of His fullness, of eternal life, of the Spirit.
 - **Luke 1:79: “To give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.”**
 - **Ezekiel 34:24-25: “And I, the LORD, will be their God, and My servant David a prince among them; I, the LORD, have spoken. I will make a covenant of peace with them, and cause wild beasts to cease from the land; and they will dwell safely in the wilderness and sleep in the woods.”**

- **Micah 5:4: And He shall stand and feed *His flock* in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD His God; and they shall abide, for now He shall be great to the ends of the earth; and this *One* shall be peace.**

4. Lev. 4 is the sin offering

- Key characteristic: Bull for the congregation or the high priest,
 - male goat for a leader,
 - female goat or lamb for the common people
 - dove or pigeon for the poor
 - flour for the very poor
- In this offering,
 - hands laid were laid on to show substitution,
 - the animal was killed to show what the sinner deserved,
 - the blood was sprinkled seven times in front of the veil,
 - some of the blood was smeared on altar of incense,
 - the remaining blood was poured out,
 - the fat was burned to God,
 - the rest was carried outside the camp and burned...
 - or the priest could eat it in the camp if it had not been offered for another priest or for the congregation (but for an individual)
- This offering was mandatory for unintentional sin
 - That is, sin arising from the weakness of the flesh (Romans 7 style)...
 - as opposed to high-handed sin (presumptuous sins)
- This was the offering that was offered on the Day of Atonement: Yom Kippur—Lev. 16, once per year for Aaron and for the congregation.
 - An atonement is made to make reconciliation for sin—it is a payment for sin to take away the guilt of the sin.
 - This is what Christ did for us:
 - **Hebrews 9:24-26: For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, *which are* copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us; not that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood of another—He then would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.**
 - Note that the sin offering was for the congregation, but also for the individual for particular sins (1 John 1:8-9)

- We do not have additional offerings, but we rely on the blood of Christ that was once shed.
- This is when the atonement was made.

5. Lev 5-6 is the guilt offering

- This is very similar to the sin offering...
 - But is used for ceremonial defilement (to restore worshippers who had become unclean)
 - And it is used for sins requiring restitution,
 - because his offence toward his brother had made him unclean in the same way that say—contact with a dead body would have made him unclean...
 - He had to go and make restitution to the offended brother, and then come to God offering the guilt offering...
 - So this offering was to set the worshipper right for appearing before God when he had become unfit.
 - In Matthew 5:23—Jesus said that if you have wronged your brother, you must make it right before you presume to worship God...
 - This still applies to us, that we must make restitution before we can expect the Lord to accept our worship...
 - And having made restitution, we have to look to Christ and His shed blood for our forgiveness.

6. It is helpful to see the proper order in which these offerings were to be made:

- Sin offering: deal with sin first
 - the atonement by the shedding of blood to wash away sin.
- Then the burnt offering: give myself completely to God
 - after sin is atoned—must be pure and spotless.
 - For us, we realise that Christ is our righteousness by His obedience.
- peace & grain offerings: enjoying communion with God.
 - nourished by Him—similar to the Lord’s Supper (a meal)
 - thanksgiving for our possession and consecration of our works.

TRANS> Such is a summary of the Old Testament priesthood...

- Such sets before us the work of Christ.

II. Christ is unique—He is THE anointed one, THE priest

- Christ's offering is superior to that of Aaron.
 - What is it that makes His offering superior?
- A. He was a priest after the order of Melchisedec (Heb. 7:17)—a superior priesthood!
- Aaron's priesthood pointed to Christ's (Heb. 7:11)
 - Aaron had to offer sacrifices for himself—Christ didn't (Heb. 7:26-27)
 - Aaron died and had successors—Christ doesn't (Heb. 7:23-24)
 - Aaron's was changeable—Christ's wasn't (Heb. 7:12, cf. 7:17)
 - Aaron appeared in a temple made with hands (Heb. 9:24)
 - Aaron offered a variety and many sacrifices that were not sufficient (Heb. 9:25-26, 10:5, 7, 10)
 - Christ's is the one offering that fulfills all these others—it takes them all up into itself...
 - It was fully sufficient
 - **1 Peter 1:18-19: “knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, *like* silver or gold, from your aimless conduct *received* by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.”**
 - Aaron's were only types of the true (Heb. 10:1, 4, 14)
 - Christ's actually accomplishes the reconciliation.
 - This is the bottom line. He puts to death the enmity between us and God by His sacrifice (Eph 2:16)
- B. The offering of Christ was an effectual offering in which He is both the sacrifice and the sacrificer.
- God has accepted His offering for us.
 - God made Him an offering for sins and was satisfied with His offering:
 - **Isa 53:10-12: Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He has put *Him* to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see *His* seed, He shall prolong *His* days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in His hand. He shall see the labor of His soul, *and* be satisfied. By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities. Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great, and He shall divide the spoil with the strong, because He poured out His soul unto death, and He was numbered with the transgressors, and He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.**

- And because He was satisfied, we are accepted in Him...
 - **Eph 1:6-8: to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence.**

III. How should this affect you?

A. It should lead you to confidently trust in **this** priest and His sacrifice alone

1. The Word of God exposes your sin and guilt (Heb 4:12-13), and Christ sympathises (Heb 4:14-16).
 - Not sympathises as one who condones everything—
 - but as one who is truly acquainted with the seriousness of our situation and our guilt—more than we are.
 - And one who does something about it...when Christ sympathises, He does much more than simply feel sorry for us.
2. This is **God's** provision for us.
 - He saw that there was no one, and He acted.
 - **Isa 59:16: He saw that *there was no man*, and wondered that *there was no intercessor*; therefore His own arm brought salvation for Him; and His own righteousness, it sustained Him.**
 - We were not able to properly intercede or offer an effectual offering.
 - **Gal 4:4: But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.**
3. Where else can you go? What else can take away your sin than the way that God has made? (John 6, Isa 53, I John 2)

B. It should lead you to a secure relationship with God.

1. Not a guilt-driven relationship
 - **Romans 8:15-18: For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father." The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him*, that we may also be glorified together. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy *to be compared* with the glory which shall be revealed in us.**
2. Yet not a self-righteous-I'm-okay relationship either

- You don't need to pretend that you have kept all God's commandments from your youth up.
 - You don't have to pretend that God will not judge sin
 - **Ps 14:1: The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God."** They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none who does good.
 - **Psalm 94:6-10: They slay the widow and the stranger, and murder the fatherless. Yet they say, "The LORD does not see, nor does the God of Jacob understand." Understand, you senseless among the people; and *you* fools, when will you be wise? He who planted the ear, shall He not hear? He who formed the eye, shall He not see? He who instructs the nations, shall He not correct, He who teaches man knowledge?**
3. But an "I-have-a-God-who-is-committed-to-my-salvation" relationship
- a. The Philippians promises:
 - **Phil 1:6 being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete *it* until the day of Jesus Christ;**
 - **Phil 2:12-13: Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for *His* good pleasure.**
 - This is a recipe for eager discipleship!
 - This is a recipe for gratitude and responsiveness for His discipline, knowing that it is for your good to help you.
 - b. Don't run from Him, but to Him with your sins:
 - **Hebrews 4:15-16: For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all *points* tempted as *we are*, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.**
 - **1 John 1:8-10: If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.**
 - In actual practice, of course it is usually He that comes to us, isn't it...
 - So perhaps the message is, respond to His call when you have sinned.
 - c. humility (you can't do it on your own—you are clean through His promise:
 - **John 15:4-5: Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you *are* the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.**

C. It should fill you with gratitude and joy

1. Gratitude and joy that lead to praise and thanksgiving

- Keeping the vow of those who have received a great deliverance!
 - Psalm 61
- Remember the pattern:
 - Desperation, deliverance, praise

2. Gratitude and joy that lead to obedience

- **Romans 12:1-2 “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, *which is* your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”**
 - This is glad submission in response to God’s mercies.

3. Gratitude and joy that lead to proclamation.

- Go and tell everyone the great things the
 - **“Lord has done for you, and how He has had compassion on you.” (Mark 5:19)**
- And after He was raised, He told us all to do that!
 - Matthew 28:18-20!
- Tell the next generation!
 - **Psalm 145:4: One generation shall praise Your works to another, and shall declare Your mighty acts.**