**CHRISTIAN WORSHIP - THEOLOGY AND PRACTICE**

Session 2

**The Sole Priesthood of Christ, the Mediator of Worship**

1. **Introduction**

* We have learned that the basic framework for human engagement with God was initiated and stipulated by the Redeemer God, particularly from the perspectives of holiness code and infrastructure of the Tabernacle / Temple, of the cultic system in the First Testament.
* We now need to examine the third element of the gift of the cult by drawing the connection between the engagement with God (worship) through the priesthood in the cultic system of the First Testament and the sole priesthood of Christ in the Second Testament.

1. **The ministry of Christ of prayer and intercession**
2. The great central act of Jewish worship took place on the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur). On that day, the worship and intercession of all Israel were led by one man, the high priest. That day symbolizes that
3. The high priest *stands before* the people as their divinely appointed *representative*, bone of their bone, flesh of their flesh, their brother, in solidarity with the people he represented—as the *one on behalf of the many*, the leader of their worship. All that he does, he does in their name. This is symbolized by the fact that he bears their names engraved on his breastplate and shoulders as a memorial before God.
4. He *consecrates* *himself* for this ministry by certain liturgical acts of washing and sacrifice, with the blood sprinkled on his right ear, right thumb, and right toe.
5. There comes the great moment when he takes an animal, lays his hands on the victim, and *vicariously confesses* the sins of all Israel in an act of penitence, acknowledging the just judgments of God.
6. When the victim is immolated as a symbol of the just judgments of God and the scapegoat is sent into the wilderness to symbolize the removal of guilt, the high priest takes the blood in a vessel, ascends into the *Holy of Holies*, and there *vicariously intercedes* for all Israel—that God will remember his covenant promises and graciously forgive them. While the high priest interceding for all Israel in the sanctuary, all Israel outside was also interceding—a great volume of prayer ascending to God, led by the high priest.
7. Finally, he returns to the waiting people outside with the Aaronic blessing of peace (benediction):

*The* *LORD bless you*

*and keep you,*

*The LORD make his face shine upon you*

*and be gracious to you,*

*The LORD turn his face toward you*

*and give you peace.*

(Nu 6:24-26)

1. The High Priest of the First Testament foreshadowed the mediatorial ministry of Christ. In his work of redemption is that of the High Priest:
2. Christ comes from the Father to be the *true* high priest, bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh, in solidarity with all humanity, bearing upon his divine-human heart the names, the needs, the sorrows, the injustices of all nations. He offers to the Father that worship, that obedience, that life of love in unbroken intimate communion, which we cannot offer.
3. He *consecrates* himself for this ministry of leading us into the presence of the Father. In his high priestly prayer, when he intercedes for his people, he says: “*For their sakes I sanctify myself that they also might be sanctified through the truth*” (Jn 17:19) – *the one for the many* – “*For both he who sanctifies and they who are sanctified are all of one, for… he is not ashamed to call them brothers* [and sisters]” (Heb 2:11). Jesus’ whole life of prayer in obedience, love, and communion in the Spirit, is this total self-consecration for us.
4. He offers not an animal, but himself in death that he might be the Lamb of God to take away the sin of the world, saying amen in our humanity to the just judgments of God. He does not appease an angry God to condition him into being gracious, but in *perfect acknowledgment* of the holy love of the Father for a sinful world, seals God’s covenant purposes for all humanity by his blood.
5. On Easter day he says to Mary, “*Do not hold on to me for I am not yet ascended to my Father, but go instead to my brothers and say to them, I ascend to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God*” (Jn 20:17). The high priest is on his way into the *Holy of Holies* to intercede for his people.
6. On the same day at evening, as the disciples are meeting in prayer in an upper room, Jesus comes and says to them, “*Peace be unto you*” (Jn 20:19ff). It is the return of the high priest who now gives the gift of Spirit that they might share with him his apostolic mission to the world (see Heb 3:1) as a royal priesthood with the word of forgiveness.
7. **The One and Many (Many in One, One for Many) in High Priesthood**
8. In the First Testament:

* When the high priest *entered* into the holy presence of Yahweh in the sanctuary that he might present all Israel in his person to God, we can say, all Israel entered in his person (*many through one*).
* Conversely, when he vicariously *confessed* their sins and *interceded* for them before God, God accepted them as his forgiven people in the person of their high priest (*one for many*).

This double statement expresses how God’s covenant dealings with Israel were established at the hands of a mediator.

1. In the Second Testament, likewise:

* When Jesus was born for us in Bethlehem, was baptized by the Spirit in the Jordon, suffered under Pontius Pilate, rose again and ascended, our humanity was born again, baptized by the Spirit, suffered, died, rose again and ascended in him, in his representative vicarious humanity. Now he presents us in himself to the Father as God’s dear children, and our righteousness is hid with Christ in God—ready to be revealed at the last day (*many in one*).
* Conversely, because Jesus has lived our life, offered himself through the eternal Spirit without spot to the Father in our name and on our behalf, as the one for the many, God accepts us in the beloved Son—immaculate in him, and only in him – “*holy and blameless in his sight*” (Eph 1:4) (*one for many*)

We pray “*in the name of Christ*” because of what he has done and is doing for us in our name. *We worship the Father in Christ as well as through Christ as we are righteous in Christ, as well as justified by faith through the work of Christ.* Jesus is the **Mediator** of the new covenant:

* the one in whom *God draws near to humanity* in covenant love and
* the one in whom we offer ourselves to the Father “*in the name of Christ*” because he has already in our name made the one true offering to the Father, the offering by which he has sanctified for all time *those who come to God* by him (Heb 10:10, 14), and because he ever lives to intercede for us in our name.

The covenant between God and humanity is concentrated in *his person*.

1. **Recapitulation**

* Recapitulation or “summing up”: *Fulfilment of God’s purposes for humanity in and through the inclusive and vicarious humanity of Christ*.

Irenaeus elaborated the parallels between Adam and Christ:

* Adam was made of virgin soil, was tempted by Satan, and brought sin and death into the world through disobedience at the tree.
* Christ was born of Virgin Mary, resisted temptation by Satan, and overcame sin by obedience to death on the cross.
* Christ **became** Son of Man (what we are) in order to make us sons of God. As a result of his life, death, and resurrection, the communion with God that was lost in Adam was regained in Christ. The human race was given a new start, and saved humanity is gathered together as one in Christ.

*“. . . to bring all things . . . together under one head, even Christ*.”

Eph 1:10

* The Son of God who created Adam for sonship, communion, and immortality does not abandon his loving purposes for humanity. But in order to redeem humanity and to bring to fulfillment of his purpose (*telos*) for humanity, he himself becomes a man that he might *fulfill for us in his own person God’s purpose of love and obedience and worship*. Thus, what is lost in one man (“the first Adam”)—communion with God—is restored and fulfilled for each one of us in Christ (“the last Adam”) and held out for us by the Spirit.
* As “the Great Physician” of our humanity, Christ does not heal us as an ordinary doctor might, by standing over against us, diagnosing our sickness, prescribing medication for us and then walks away, leaving us to get better as we follow his instructions. No, he becomes the patient! He assumes that very humanity that needs redemption, and
  + by being anointed by the Spirit in our humanity,
  + by a life of perfect obedience,
  + by dying and rising again for us,

our humanity *is healed in his person*. We are healed, not just through Christ because of the work of Christ, but *in and through* Christ. *Person and work must not be separated.*

What implications does this have on worship?

1. **The Double Movements in worship.**

The *God-human-ward* and *human-God-ward* relationship (movement), both freely given to us **in Jesus Christ**.

* The weakness of the existent model of worship is that *we are simply summoned to respond* in faith, in decision, in repentance and obedience. This does not do full justice to the meaning of grace, for it short-circuits the **recapitulation**: *the vicarious humanity of Christ*.
* *Grace* has a double meaning:
  + - that in the coming of Jesus Christ, God gives himself in love to humanity—the *God-human-ward* movement.
    - that the coming of God *as man*, to *do for us in himself through the eternal Spirit to the Father*. In other words, the *human-God-ward* movement, in which we are given to ***participate*** (as in **worship and communion**), is given to us freely and unconditionally. ***Our response in faith and obedience is a participation to the response already made for us by Christ to the Father’s holy love—a response we are summoned to make in union with Christ***.

1. *God-human-ward* movement:

On the Day of Atonement, the high priest mediator, in representing Hashem to Israel and Israel to Hashem,

* brought God’s word of grace and forgiveness to the people and,
* on behalf of all Israel, confessed their sins by bearing witness to God’s judgment, in offering the sacrificial victim and sprinkling the blood on the altar.

So, in Jesus Christ we have one who as the Word incarnate, brings the Father’s word of grace and forgiveness to our fallen world, but who in our fallen humanity vicariously absorbs the Father’s condemnation of our sins—being made a curse for us.

1. *Human-God-ward* movement:

When Christ bore our sins on the cross without any condition, it means that there is forgiveness with God that he might be feared; *it summons from us an unconditional response of faith and repentance*.

* By responding to the announcement of forgiveness on the cross (a word of love and reconciliation but also condemnation), one has to submit to the verdict of guilty. There would be a real change of mind, an act of penitence [metanoia], conversion, reconciliation.
* *But who can make that perfect response of love, that perfect act of penitence, that perfect submission to the verdict of guilty?* We cannot! What we cannot do, *God has done in Christ*, through recapitulation. Jesus Christ stands in for us in our humanity, in our name, he perfectly
* offered up our desires to God and continues to offer them.
* lived a life agreeable to the will of God,
* vicariously confessed our sins and submitted to the verdict of guilty of us, and
* gave thanks to God.

In other words, God not only speaks the word of forgiveness to us. He also provides for us **one,** in Jesus Christ, who makes the perfect response of vicarious penitence for us in death, to the divine condemnation of our sin.

Therefore, in our response, *in our worship*, we not only in faith receive that word of forgiveness so freely spoken, but we receive it in repentance, submitting humbly to the guilty verdict (which is repentance) before the cross. At the same time, we know that by God’s grace we have one in Christ, who has already submitted to that verdict for us long ago. *Our repentance is thus a response to grace, not a condition of grace*. It is the gift of the Spirit to participate in the vicarious penitence of Christ, in his priestly vicarious self-offering. This participation is our *amen* to the cross, our response to the amen spoken by Jesus Christ standing in our place before the Father. This is “evangelical repentance” and the meaning of *conversion*.

1. **The Sole Priesthood of Jesus Christ**

* The work of redemption of Christ is always spelt out in the language of the ancient cult:

“*In him we have redemption through his* ***blood****, the* ***forgiveness of sins****, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace . . .*” (Eph 1:7)

“*But now he has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through* ***death*** *to present* ***holy*** *in his sight,* ***without blemish*** *and free from accusation.”* (Col 1:22)

“*Therefore, do not let anyone judge you by what you* ***eat or drink****, or with regard to a religious* ***festival****, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ*.” (Col 2:16-17)

* That Jesus Christ is the *leader of our worship—*the *high priest* who forgives us our sins and leads us into the holy presence of the Father, is the central theme of the Epistle to the Hebrews.
* Hebrews was written to Christians who had at one time looked to Jesus Christ in faith and followed him, but then had taken their eyes off Christ and fallen back into their former religious practices, with a false legalistic self-confidence in human institutions and ordinances. They had apparently suffered persecution and reproach, and, by yielding to the temptation to be unfaithful, had drifted away from Christ.
* Due to their unfaithfulness, like Israel in the wilderness, they were unable to enter into the “*rest*” of the promised land. They were in danger of sinking into apostasy. So, the writer seeks to give them a fresh vision of Jesus Christ, our high priest, through whom alone we can find forgiveness and come into the holy presence of God.
* The Epistle, in calling these lapsed Christians back to Christ, clearly expounds the place of Jesus Christ in worship, contrasting it with the old Levitical rites to which the people had apparently returned. The author of Hebrews speaks about “*the ordinances of worship*” [*dikaiomata latreias*,] having been fulfilled for us only by Jesus Christ our high priest, so that we can draw near to God only through him (Heb 9:1). He alone can wash away our sins, who offered himself for us to God through the eternal Spirit. The writer contrasted *two forms of worship*:
  + *true worship*, which means *resting on and participating in* the self-offering of Christ who alone can lead us into “the Holy of Holies” – the holy presence of the Father; but
  + *false worship*, with its false reliance on what we do by following our own devices or traditions.

In other words, *when we take our eyes off* ***Jesus Christ and that worship and offering which God has provided for us in Christ****, which alone is acceptable to him, we fall back on our “religion.”*

“*The point of what we are saying is this: We do have such a high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, and who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by man. Every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices, and so it was necessary for this one also to have something to offer. If he were on earth, he would not be a priest, for there are already men who offer the gifts prescribed by the law. They serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven. This is why Moses was warned when he was about to build the tabernacle: “See to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.” But the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, and it is founded on better promises.”*

Heb 8:1-6

* The *Unitarian view* of worship (or false worship) is what the religious people do to try to please God by themselves (by passing Christ), resorting to their own intellectual, emotional, and volitional resources. But true worship is *Trinitarian—*where worship is recognized as the gift of grace to *participate* through the *Spirit* in the incarnate *Son*’s communion with the *Father*—the way of joy and peace and confidence.
* There is no more urgent need in our churches today than to recover the Trinitarian nature of grace—that it is by grace alone, *through the gift of Jesus Christ in the Spirit that we can enter into and live a life of communion with God the Father*. The interpretation of worship and church in terms of grace – *of Christ as the sole mediator between God and humanity—*is fundamental to our understanding of worship (1Ti 2:1-6).
* Here again is the *double meaning of grace*. The God to whom we pray and with whom we commune knows we want to pray, try to pray, but cannot pray. So, God *comes to us as man* in Jesus Christ to stand in for us, pray for us, teach us to pray and lead our prayers. God in grace ***gives us*** *what he seeks* ***from us****—*a life of prayer—in giving us Jesus Christ and the Spirit. The *sole priesthood of Christ* means that Christ is both *the object of our worship* and *the leader of our worship*. The church is only the royal priesthood in the sense that it *shares* by grace in the priesthood of Christ. Only in this way can we understand our Christian worship as an *ordinance of grace*, where Christ is the only *Mediator*. It is supremely in Jesus Christ that we see the double meaning of grace. *Grace means that God gives himself to us as God, freely and unconditionally, to be worshipped and adored. But grace also means that God comes to us in Jesus Christ as man, to do for us and in us what we cannot do in response.* He continues to offer a life of perfect obedience, worship, and prayer to the Father, that we might be drawn by the Spirit into communion with the Father, “*through Jesus Christ our Lord*.” Worship is trinitarian.

**Conclusion**

1. The story of the sculptor / the two Adams embracing each other. There one sees what was lost in Adam has been restored in Christ. That is the biblical concept of “the one and many”—we, the many, can see ourselves accepted by grace in Christ, the one mediator, who fulfills God’s purpose—to gather together all things in Christ, the head—*recapitulation*.
2. The metaphor of a hug. When we hug somebody whom we love there is a *double movement*. We give ourselves to the beloved by putting our arms around the other, and in the same act, to draw that person close to our heart! That is the parable of double movement of grace, the God-human-ward and the human-God-ward movement *in the priesthood of Christ and the ministry of the Holy Spirit*. God our Father in grace gives himself to us as God. But in Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, and in the Spirit (his two “arms”), we are led to the Father by the intercessions of Christ and in the intercession of the Spirit. We are lifted up by the “everlasting arms.” In the mediatorial ministry of Christ, the Spirit is the interceding Spirit, through whom Jesus Christ our ascended high priest presents us to the Father. (Trinitarian worship)
3. The parable of the prodigal son. *While the prodigal was still a long way off, his father saw his son and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him (hugged him) and kissed him*” (Lk 15:20).