

We Believe in Jesus

LESSON
FOUR

The Priest Discussion Forum



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We Believe in Jesus

Lesson Four: The Priest

Discussion Forum

With

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Question 1:

How did Jesus fulfill the office of priest?

In his role as Christ, Jesus fulfilled three human offices that God had used to administer his kingdom in the Old Testament: the offices of prophet, priest and king. In Jesus' day, the most prominent role of Levitical priests was to serve God in the temple and its grounds. But this wasn't what Jesus did. How did Jesus fulfill the office of priest?

Dr. Glen Scorgie

One of the very important functions that Jesus Christ fulfilled was the function, or the office of a priest. We mean by priest, someone who mediates, who brings together estranged parties, who stands in the middle with an arm to each side uniting. That's the function of a priest. And there's a very real sense in which the incarnation itself, inasmuch as it was the arrival amongst us of the eternal Son, was a uniting and priestly act. It was our "rapprochement." It was Emmanuel, God with us. And then, as we move through the stages of his life to that final drama on the cross, we see in the death of Christ, not the tragic end to a misguided career, but a purposeful event in which all the sacrificial and substitutionary image of the Old Testament sacrificial system is fulfilled and completed in the one who is both the priest before God on behalf of the people with whom he has identified and himself the sacrifice, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. But then, as priest, his work is not fully complete for he ascends to the Father, sits at the Father's right hand, and at this very moment he continues ever to intercede for us. In the existential realities of ongoing time, he continues to function as priest, eternally applying to our accounts the infinite merits of what has been, historically been, achieved so that as the Father looks at us stumbling and blundering along, we are in Christ forever.

Dr. K. Erik Thoennes

A prophet represents God before people, speaks the truth of God representing God in front of people. Well, a priest does the opposite. He represents people before God.

Jesus came as a priest, and there were two primary ways he fulfilled that priestly office. The first was to make atonement. His life and death served as an atoning sacrifice so that we could be friends with God again when we were just enemies. The second function of Jesus as priest is that he has an intercessory role. He has an ongoing role of interceding for the saints before the throne based on his perfect atoning work, but he has an ongoing relationship with us as our intercessory priest.

Dr. Gideon Umukoro

Jesus is our priest. When we talk about the priesthood of Jesus, almost every African understands what a priest means, because we still have the different kinds of priests, idol priest, and all kinds of priests. In short, a priest is one who stands between you, the offender, and gods that you have offended. He is the one that brings the sacrifices on behalf of you to the gods. That is a picture of what Jesus Christ came to do for us as the priest. He is the final sacrifice. Before he came, we have other sacrifices that we used to atone for our sins: the blood of bulls, rams, turtle doves. But Jesus Christ came, and he gave the utmost sacrifice once and for all, entered into the Holy of Holies with his blood, put it on the mercy seat, and henceforth we don't need another priest or another sacrifice. And right now, as we talk, he is before God bringing our intercession, bringing our requests as the high priest before the presence of the Almighty God. So it gladdens my heart because I understand this by our own culture where I am coming from in Africa, the importance of priesthood. So we give God the praise who had made this done for us once and for all, and today we have a great mediator, a great priest who daily brings us before God, and it gladdens my heart.

Dr. Carl Trueman

Jesus Christ is our priest. He performs that function in his life, his death, his resurrection, and now in his ascension to the right hand of the Father. He performs the function of a priest by interceding on behalf of his people and making a sacrificial offering for them. On earth, of course, he was interceding for his people in the High Priestly Prayer in John where he talks to the Father about the people that the Father has given him. He offers himself as a sacrifice upon the cross at Calvary, and now, ascended at the right hand of the Father, he offers himself continually in intercession to the Father on our behalf, fulfilling the great Old Testament role of the priest.

Question 2:

How did the incarnation make God the Son a more effective high priest?

God the Son has always existed in Trinity with God the Father and the Spirit. But to save humanity from sin, the Son chose to take on a full human nature, partly in order to become our high priest. But how was this helpful? Wouldn't it have been easier for him to stay in heaven and intercede for us without taking on a human nature? How did the incarnation make God the Son a more effective high priest?

Dr. K. Erik Thoennes

The Bible tells us that Jesus had to be made like his brothers in every way so he could become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God and make atonement for the sins of the people. Jesus' being fully man enables him to sympathize with our weaknesses because he's been tempted in all ways like us, yet was without sin.

Dr. Mark Strauss

Jesus' incarnation made him a more effective high priest because he could sympathize, he could empathize. He could understand exactly what we are going through. Hebrews 4:15 says that we do not have a high priest who cannot empathize with us, but one who has been tested, one who has been tempted in every way as we have been tempted and tested as human beings. Sometimes, we as conservative, as evangelical Christians, so emphasize the deity of Christ that we forget that it's really his humanity that saves us. Because Jesus became a true human being, he could suffer and die for us, for our sins. So, Jesus' humanity is essential to our salvation, it's essential to his high priesthood, because only as a human being could Jesus pay the penalty for our sins.

Dr. J. Ligon Duncan

The Bible tells us that Jesus' incarnation made him a high priest who is able to be touched with the feeling of our infirmities. And that means that he is a more effective high priest than he would have been or could have been had he not known the fullness of what it is to be human and experience that with and for us. There are a variety of ways that that's manifested. One is that Jesus in his own life and experience had dealt with and encountered the same range of human problems in the fallen world that we do, that God in the flesh knows the same kind of heartaches and sorrows and disappointments and betrayals and wounds that anyone who lives in this fallen world experiences. This is not something theoretical to him, this is not something that he stood off in the deep bowels of space, in the dusty past of eternity and speculated about. It's something that he came into the world in our poor flesh, in our poor blood, and experienced himself. He's not, as C.H. Spurgeon would have said, a "dry-land sailor." He's not someone who's an expert on sailing who's never been in a boat. He himself has been in our own flesh and blood and has experienced this whole same range of problems in a fallen world that we experience.

But, it's even better than that, I think. It's better than that because the Lord Jesus not only experienced that common range of problems in a fallen world, but he experienced them in an extreme degree. The Bible makes it clear that Jesus' humiliation is not something that was confined to the cross. Nor was it something that was confined to the opposition that he experienced in his earthly ministry, but that it was something that he began to experience from the moment that he was born. His humiliation for instance begins in his birth in that he's born to a very common family without substantial political power or financial means. He's laid in the feeding trough of animals for his manger. I don't think there is a mother in the world who would want to put her newborn child in a feeding trough for animals. And his whole course

of life, he tells us himself, is operated in the extremes of lack. He tells us that “the foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.” So, the Lord Jesus is saying that to those who are the most deprived of material comforts in this life, I am able to relate to you, because I was not born in a palace. I did not grow up in a family that afforded me fine clothes and the best of worldly enjoyments. I experienced the same kind of lack that about 80% of the world’s population has over the duration of the time that there have been human beings on this planet. And so the Lord Jesus is able as a high priest to sympathize with those who endure those kinds of lacks and wants.

But I think even more than that, the Lord Jesus’ sympathy for us as high priest is found at a point not of commonality with us in our human nature, but a point of difference. I think that a lot of people think that Jesus can’t relate to them because he was sinless and they’re sinners. The idea is, unless you’ve been down in my sin, you really don’t understand me. And I think the opposite is actually true. Think of it. What if you lived in a world and you had perfect pitch and you could hear everyone around you singing off key? Would that make it easier for you or harder for you at a concert? Well, I happen to know some people who have perfect pitch. And I happen to know that it’s sometimes very difficult for them to hear a tenor almost hit the right note or a soprano almost hit the right note. It’s almost torture for them to have to listen to that. Well, Jesus lived in a world filled with sin and he was perfect. And he not only lived in a world filled with sin and was perfect, but he had to live his entire life in consciousness that he himself was going to bear that sin which he had not committed.

Now, none of us know what the future holds for us. Jesus did. Every conscious moment of his ministry he knew that he had come to die and to bear sins that he had not himself committed. The idea of contracting sin, and bearing sin, and “bearing shame and scoffing rude” is something that weighed on him. The Gospels record these events in the final week of Jesus’ life. John tells us that his heart was deeply troubled and he cried out for God and begged God to be glorified in him because he was so overwhelmed at the prospect of what was going to happen at the end of Passover week. Well, Jesus as our high priest lived sinlessly in a world surrounded by sinners, which must have been a vexation to his soul. Have you ever been in a situation where you’re one person trying to resist the predominant sin in a community around you while loving those sinners and not engaging in the same kind of activity that they engage in? This is how Jesus lived every conscious moment of his life. It must have been enormously, psychologically burdensome. And then to know that he was going to die the death that they deserved, bearing their sin in their place. This he did for us.

So when you look at Jesus, you can’t say “Jesus you just don’t understand me.” Because it’s not only that Jesus made you, and he knows what’s in you. It’s not only that Jesus, because he is the God-man, in his divinity knows every thought of what we are. John can put it this way: he himself knew what was in them — speaking of Jesus knowing the hearts of men. But it is that Jesus in our flesh has lived sinlessly in

the midst of sinners, knowing that he was going to bear the penalty due to sinners though in him there was no sin. And that built in the Lord Jesus Christ a sympathy whereby he is able to be down in the dust with us. And I think that that truth ought to be enormously encouraging to all Christians that we don't have a high priest that doesn't understand what it's like to be human. And even in those sins, which we have committed, that he has not, he knows things about the psychological burden of that sin that we ourselves do not know.

Dr. Dennis Johnson

It's a great question to ask how the incarnation made the Son of God a more effective high priest for us. We know that as the Son of God he has divine omniscience; he knows everything. And yet again, the writer to the Hebrews emphasizes that this God who knows all things, who sustains all things, who is eternal, became in the Son a human being, so that we would have a brother who was a high priest. Hebrews begins to pick up that theme at the end of chapter 2 when it quotes from Psalm 22 — He is not ashamed to call us his brothers. He will confess the Father's name before his brothers — and immediately moves on into that reality that Jesus comes to share our human nature, become our brother, to be a merciful and faithful high priest. He picks that up at the end of chapter 4 and the beginning of chapter 5 talking about the fact that our high priest is one who can be touched with the feeling of our weakness. And then connects in to Aaron, the Old Testament high priest, and Aaron's sons. Aaron was taken from among the brothers — that is the Israelites — and therefore could represent them before God and his holiness. Now Aaron and his sons were all sinners, and so Hebrews also points out that Aaron and his sons needed to offer an atoning sacrifice for their own sins first of all before they offered atoning sacrifices for the sins of Israel.

Jesus, of course, doesn't need an atoning sacrifice for his own sins; he has none. But he can intercede for us from the perspective of one who, as a human being, has endured all the tests and the trials that are lodged against our faith and our faithfulness by the evil one. And, of course, Jesus endured them all with perfection. So his incarnation qualifies him in a particular way that perhaps we can't fully grasp because we're dealing with mystery here, to intercede for us, to pray for us. But, of course, the other crucial thing is that we need not only a priest who knows us; we also need a sacrifice that is sinless. And Hebrews also speaks of that, especially Hebrews 10. The preacher to the Hebrews quotes from Psalm 40 and references the fact that in Psalm 40 the speaker there, who is the psalmist, but the psalmist speaking for Christ as he enters the word, is coming to take up the body prepared for him, to offer that body as the final sacrifice. Jesus became a human being in order to provide the sacrifice that we needed. The blood of bulls and goats Hebrews says, testified to our need for cleansing but could only cleanse externally and not get to the conscience. But the blood of Christ shed for us in his humanity, in his perfect humanity, atones for our sin and cleanses our conscience so that we can draw near to God in confidence.

Question 3:

How did Jesus fulfill the function and significance of the temple?

God's temple in Jerusalem was his holy house on earth. And when Jesus came as our Great High Priest, he made several statements that tied him directly to the temple, not just as priest, but as the fulfillment and replacement of the temple itself. How did Jesus fulfill the function and significance of the temple?

Dr. Stephen Wellum

The relation of the temple to Jesus is very, very important, and Jesus comes as the fulfillment of the temple. Now, how does he do this? Well, it's very clear that he sees himself as the fulfillment of the temple — John 2. You think of it when he's dealing with the religious leaders, he'll say, "Destroy this temple in three days and I will rebuild it." And they say, well, you know, "How is this possible? How can you build this temple in three days?" And John adds that sort of parentheses there, "Well, after his resurrection we understood that he was referring to himself." So, Jesus sees himself as the new temple, as the fulfillment of the temple. It's important to realize that the temple in the Old Testament is really the meeting place between God and his people. You think of that "Holy of Holies" where, even though God is all-present, he uniquely dwells with his people. It's the place where sacrifice would take place. It's where the priest would go into the presence representing the people. All of that symbolized God's presence with his people, the means of atonement, the means of provision by which he could be their God and they could be his people. Jesus as the fulfillment of this is the one who in his very person, and in his very work is the one who is the mediator. He is our priest. He is the one who brings God's presence to pass. He is, into very self, Emmanuel, God with us. He is the fulfillment of the temple in that he is the one who brings what it points forward to, to its end. He brings the sacrifices to an end. He now opens up access. You think of the New Testament, the new covenant reality that we have direct access, quite contrast with the Old Testament people of God where they could only, through one priest once a year have access. He is now the one who is the mediator; he gives us access to the Father. Through him, we now can come directly to God, and through him, we then by extension are temples where the Spirit of God dwells with us. We are now in intimate relationship. The barriers are removed. So he is the fulfillment of the temple in that he is the one to which the temple pointed.

Dr. Wai-yee Ng (translation)

John's gospel indicates that Jesus fulfilled the function of the temple. In the Old Testament, the holy temple was the place where God can be with his people, and where the people of God could worship him and be near to him. So in John 4, in the discussion about the place of worship, the Jewish people said that the proper place was the temple, but Jesus has brought this temple into a perfect state. He has become the mediator through whom human beings can approach God. Only by relying on Jesus Christ can we be with God. Jesus died for us and completed salvation so that we can receive the true life that he gives. Because of Christ, we are allowed to be with

God and to live in him. In this way, Jesus replaces, or completes, the function typified by the Old Testament temple.

Dr. Mark Gignilliat

The temple in the Old Testament was God's special presence among his people. It was lifted; it was raised in the community; it was life in the midst of death; it was the Garden of Eden in the midst of a fallen world. And there's a sense in which, as Jonah learned the hard way, that God is everywhere. He's omnipresent; he can't be avoided. But there's another sense from an Old Testament, and a New Testament perspective, that God is specially present in particular places. And the temple was God's special presence on earth; it was the way in which he encountered his people. Again, to use language that's familiar in our tradition: the temple is God's "sacramental presence" — a physical reality that exhibits God's presence among his people. So, when the New Testament begins to pick up on this theme — in John 1, for example, Jesus "tabernacles" among his people — he is the actual presence in the temple of God, there for his people. It's his salvific presence, his life-giving presence. And then you also have that kind of enigmatic, cryptic statement that Jesus says when he passes by the temple, and he says, "Tear this down, this temple down, and in three days I'll build it up again." And they laughed at Jesus because they knew the second temple took years to construct under the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah and subsequent generations, but they didn't know that Jesus was talking about himself. He's the temple. He is God's presence among his people. And that presence among his people is our salvation. It's our redemption. He is God's temple.

Dr. Peter Walker

One of the fascinating things in John's gospel is just how much of it is set in the temple in Jerusalem. And it's obviously very important for John to convey some kind of connection between Jesus and the temple. I think what's going on here is that for Jewish people, the temple was the place where they believed that God's Shekinah glory had once upon dwelt, and there's a bit of a dispute as to whether it still dwelt there at the time of Jesus, but that's what it was really meant to be. And so John portrays Jesus as now being a similar divine presence on earth, just like the temple was so now Jesus is God's presence. And then you notice that this goes all through his gospel, he begins in John 1:14 with this phrase "the Word of God tabernacled" or "dwelt" amongst us; it's the temple word again. Then in John chapter 2 you have Jesus going into the temple and the cleansing of the temple, and in that conversation, Jesus says, "destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days." And John makes a little comment; he was talking about the temple of his body. What's John doing there? He's saying just as the temple was, so now Jesus is; Jesus is God's presence, and we don't need the old Jerusalem temple, we now need Jesus, we've been given Jesus, and that's great. And then through the rest of these opening sections of John's gospel, it's uncanny how much relates to the temple still.

I think it's just helpful to remember that there were three or four main festivals, which were associated with the temple, but the three, which are most important in John's gospel, are Passover — Passover lamb being sacrificed. Well, in John's gospel we're

going to discover that Jesus is the Passover Lamb way back in chapter 1: “Behold, the Lamb of God,” says John the Baptist. And at the end of the gospel, it’s uncanny how Jesus is crucified at the same time as the Passover lambs are being slaughtered in the temple. So that’s one temple motif, which is being fulfilled in Jesus. There was another festival called the Dedication, Hanukkah — John 10. We discover that Jesus is walking around in the winter, and that’s the time of Hanukkah, Dedication. And just in that chapter you have the interesting phrase, Jesus himself saying, “I am dedicated to the Father.” So, that’s another in which Jesus is fulfilling this temple festival. But perhaps the third and most interesting one is the Feast of Tabernacles, which took place in the autumn, September or October, and we have Jesus then in the Feast of Tabernacles in John 7–8, and at this festival there was a great light, a great flame put up in the middle of the temple — Josephus says you could see it all around Jerusalem — and also there was a great ceremony of water as it was brought up from the Pool of Siloam and brought to the temple. And it’s very interesting how Jesus picks up both of those things saying, you know, “out of your heart will flow streams of living water,” picking up the water theme, and then in chapter 8, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness.” So we see here John deliberately showing how Jesus has fulfilled three major festivals — Passover, Dedication, and Tabernacles. It’s fascinating.

Question 4:

Why were the Old Testament priestly ceremonies so important?

One of the functions Levitical priests performed was conducting ceremonies. The Old Testament law makes it clear that the ceremonial aspects of the priesthood were very important. But Christians sometimes have a hard time understanding how ceremonies could be so valuable. Why were the Old Testament priestly ceremonies so important?

Dr. Frank Barker

Those Old Testament festivals and sacrifices and all pointed back to things that had happened and pointed to things that were going to happen. For instance, the Passover that they would observe, that pointed back to when they were delivered from Egypt through the blood of the lamb being put over their doorpost, and all the firstborn sons in Egypt were killed that didn’t have that blood over it, and that’s what led Pharaoh to say, let them go, and so on. And they were delivered from that. But, of course, that also pictured the deliverance that we would get from our “Egypt,” from bondage. And our “Pharaoh” would be Satan. And we are delivered when we put the blood over our lives, in a sense. That has to be applied. It wasn’t enough that the blood be shed; it had to be applied. And that happens when we put our faith in Christ, of course. So they sort of pointed back, and they pointed forward. For instance, one of the ceremonies, they would live in tents for a week or so, and that pointed back to when they were in the desert. And God wanted them to remember those days and to keep it before them and before their children. This was a good way of instructing in the history of God and the deliverance of the nation and his relation to them. Also, it

pointed forward to things like Christ coming, his death, and the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, which was one of the festivals that they were to observe, the Feast of Weeks, and that last day of that would be when the Spirit would come, and there would be a great harvest, in a sense, of souls. So, all of those were pointing back and pointed forward, and very important.

Dr. Riad Kassis

There were many special occasions in the Old Testament, in Old Testament times like festivals, the Sabbath and other occasions. And I think there were two aspects of these special occasions. There was the religious aspect. These were occasions where people celebrated God's goodness, God's grace. But there was also another social aspect. I think in these special occasions people came together to strengthen their relationships, to enjoy their life as a community — something which is very much needed in our own days, in addition to that religious aspect. Sabbath was a day for worship, but it was also a day of rest. It was a day to enjoy God's creation and to enjoy fellowship with other fellow men and women.

Question 5:

How did the Old Testament sacrificial system demonstrate God's mercy?

The most frequent task performed by Levitical priests at the temple was the offering and presenting of sacrifices to God. These included sacrifices for atonement, thanksgiving, fellowship, and other purposes. Sadly, Christians often think that the sacrificial system focused entirely on God's anger with human sin. But Scripture repeatedly points to the sacrificial system as evidence of God's kindness and compassion. How did the Old Testament sacrificial system demonstrate God's mercy?

Dr. Mark Gignilliat

The God of the Old Testament is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and I think that within the life of the church there can often be this understanding, a bad understanding, of the God of the Old Testament, he's sort of law, and he's mean and then the God of the New Testament is where we find grace and mercy. And that actually is a very poor schema when one recognizes that even built into the Old Testament itself is the gracious character of God. God does take sin seriously, and we see this through the life of Israel's history; we see it in their sacrificial system as well. But we see, I think, in the Old Testament, in the prophetic tradition, and in Israel's cultic worshipping life, is that God's "no" of judgment is never his final word; his "yes" of grace is. So, even though there was sin and there was breaking of the Law in the Old Testament, God had built into the Old Testament a sacrificial system so that grace was even present there. And we know that all of that ultimately witnessed and anticipated the coming One who would be the final sacrifice for all humanity and for all time.

Dr. Riad Kassis

The sacrificial system of the Old Testament shows that God is merciful and compassionate to his people. I think God wanted the people to have a tangible, concrete sign of being forgiven. In addition to this, I think the sacrificial system in the Old Testament shows God's mercy, because that system was the shadow for what was going to happen in the New Testament when Jesus Christ offered himself as God's greatest sacrifice. And by doing that, he showed God's greatest mercy to mankind.

Question 6:**How was Jesus' death on the cross related to the Old Testament sacrifices?**

In a number of places, the New Testament teaches that Jesus' work on the cross was anticipated by the priestly sacrifices outlined in the Old Testament. But what's the connection between the two? How was Jesus' death on the cross related to the Old Testament sacrifices?

Dr. Frank Barker

Well, the way Christ's death on the cross was related to the Old Testament sacrifice is all of those blood sacrifices, like the lamb, pointed to the fact of Jesus Christ would be the true Lamb of God. John the Baptist pointed to Jesus and said, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." And the Passover, which the lamb's blood was put over the doorpost of your house, that was the very day Jesus would die on. But also, when you had the temple and that innermost part of the temple was the holiest of all, and the priest one day a year would take the blood of the lamb all the way into that and place it on the top of that Ark of the Covenant that had the Ten Commandments in it, and that was called the Mercy Seat. Then the people—he would come out and tell the people their sins were forgiven. He would confess their sins over the lamb and then take the lamb's blood in. But also, the day that Jesus died on the cross, when he died, that veil that separated that innermost part of the temple was rent in twain, and that pointed to the fact that now Jesus has died and we don't have to offer any more lambs; the Lamb has died, and we don't need to offer any more lambs.

Dr. Ben Witherington III

Old Testament sacrifice is about the offering of animals or grain or fruits or one or another thing to God. So when we're dealing with the death of Jesus, there are ways that are similar and there are ways it's different from Old Testament sacrifices. The kinds of sacrifices that the New Testament writers interpret Jesus' death as being like are atoning sacrifices, sacrifices of atonement of various kinds, and also the use of the scapegoat practice in antiquity. For example, in the Gospel of John, when we hear the proclamation of John, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world," this is actually combining two different traditions. The sacrificial lamb of Passover, which is not an atoning sacrifice; it's an apotropaic sacrifice, that is a

sacrifice that avoids judgment. And then the scapegoat tradition in the Old Testament, where you lay hands on a goat, your sins are ceremonially passed on to the goat, and the goat is sent off into the wilderness, indicating that God has removed from you your sort of offense against God. Well, there are various ways that the atonement is imaged, and there are various metaphors used in the atoning death of Jesus, but these are the two principle ones, and what they are dealing with at the heart of the matter is that sin is an obstacle in your relationship with God, and that's true of various Old Testament sacrifices as well. Perhaps the most important tradition that sort of presages what happens in the Gospels is in Isaiah, of course — Isaiah 52 and 53 — where we hear about the death of some suffering servant figure who's providing, if you will, the substitute for God's people, who provides, if you will, an atoning death, a ransom for the many, which is actually what Jesus says about his own coming death.

Question 7:

If we have peace with God, why does he still discipline us?

Part of Jesus' job as priest was to atone for our sins, and reconcile us to God. And the New Testament makes it clear that because Jesus succeeded in this work, we have peace with God. But the Bible also teaches that God disciplines believers when we sin. Are these two ideas in conflict with each other? If we have peace with God, why does he still discipline us?

Dr. Thomas Nettles

We have peace with God because we recognize that our sin is forgiven. Paul says, "There's therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus." On several occasions he calls God "the God of peace," which is an amazing thing because he could be represented as the God who is our enemy, God who is wrathful, God who hates wicked-doers, God who abhors those who disobey him. But he calls him the God of peace, so we rejoice in the peace that he has given us. Peace means that we have been reconciled, that God is our friend now in Christ. And he continues to be our friend in that he knows that the corruption that has come upon us is one of the elements of the punishment that has come because we are fallen under condemnation. We are filled with envy, and we are filled with rivalry, and we are filled with jealousy and lust. The flesh continues to lust against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh. Well, those are the very things that actually constitute a large element of hell. When people are in hell, then we are going to see all of these things unleashed with their full fury. There will be no mercy that represses any of these things in humanity. And so, a part of the suffering of hell will be the unleashing of envy and rivalry and hatred toward one another. It will be horrific when added to that active wrath that God has. So, what God is doing when he disciplines us is he is removing from us those seeds of hell — as James talks about, the tongue as set on fire of hell. And God is removing that from us. He is sanctifying us. He is removing those things that are bad for us. He is showing us that we need to ask more for the fullness of the Holy Spirit. We need to mortify the flesh more. We need to make sure that

those elements that are a part of the manifestation of hell are being removed from us. And so, God is chastising us. He's chastening us as children because he is making life filled with joy and is giving us more and more of those portions of heaven even while we are here. And so God's chastening of us is not his punishing us; it is his fatherly kindness toward us in taking us away from those elements that will constitute a large part of the horror of hell for those who experience it in the future.

Dr. Dennis Johnson

I think of Psalm 103, which speaks of the fact that "as a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him." "He knows our frame. He remembers that we are dust." Another crucial dimension of a father's care that is — when a father's caring for his children as the Father, God the Father, cares for us — is loving discipline. I think of Hebrews 12, for example, where the writer to the Hebrews, quoting from Proverbs 3, calls us to be patient in enduring the discipline of the Lord and then really unpacks that analogy, talks about the way that our human fathers disciplined us by their best lights, didn't always know fully how to do it, but they did their best, for a time. But our heavenly Father always is disciplining us for our good, and that though discipline in the present may be painful, afterward it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness. The Father loves us too much to leave us in our childish selfishness. It's a discipline. It's a calling of us to live out the life of faith and to grow in our faith.

Question 8:

Can true believers lack confidence and doubt their salvation?

The salvation Jesus has brought us as our priest is a blessing too great to measure. But for a variety of reasons, sometimes Christians worry about their own salvation. We wonder if our faith is real, or if we've personally received the salvation Scripture describes. When we have doubts like this, does it mean we haven't been saved? Can true believers lack confidence and doubt their salvation?

Dr. Stephen Wellum

It is possible for true believers to lack confidence and even doubt their salvation. It's very, very clear that given what our Lord Jesus Christ has accomplished, his finished work; there's nothing to be added to it. When we come to saving faith in him, we are brought into faith union with him. We are to have confidence. We do not have to despair that our sins have not been dealt with, that somehow God will bring up something in the future that Christ has not already paid for in full. Yet, for a variety of reasons, sometimes we lack confidence, and there can be a variety of reasons for it. It may be that we are not trusting God's promises. We are not taking him at his word. When he says, all those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, sins are forgiven — "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just" — sometimes we doubt that. And the solution to that lack of confidence is believing the promises of God, being reminded again of what the Lord Jesus Christ has done, taking God's Word to heart.

Sometimes, though, we lack confidence because of our own sin. We wander from the Lord. We act in ways that are not faithful to him. The Spirit of God convicts us of our sin. We then have to make sure that we make our calling and election sure, that we are those who, if we are walking out of relationship with God, that confidence is not there. It's not just sort of automatic. It's there because we trust in the finished work of Christ, yet we have to also walk with him. And as we do, as we look to him day by day, as we walk to him, with him, faithfully, that confidence should be there. It will be there. God will testify to us by his Spirit that we are his children — think of the great chapter of assurance, Romans 8 — and bear witness to us that truly we are the children of God.

Dr. Glen Scorgie

True believers can sometimes lack confidence and doubt their salvation. I think that it is a very cruel doctrine that would suggest that when our inner, subjective awareness of our full salvation in Christ falters, that we are in peril of losing our salvation. It's very important to understand that the basis of our salvation is that God holds us, not how emotively or affectively that we are apprehending that truth. And yet, there is a ministry of the Holy Spirit, which is the assuring work of the Holy Spirit, who comes — and this is one of his most exquisite gifts — and supernaturally presses in upon our insecure consciousness, that it is well with our souls, and underneath are the everlasting arms. We evangelicals have as one of our most precious old hymns, “Blessed Assurance.” This is the legitimate and rightful heritage of every truly born-again redeemed Christian. But there are moments that, even the greatest saints attest, when you go through a dark night of the soul. And to strengthen the muscles of resilient faith you must go for a period alone without the comforting, affective, subjective feelings of your adoption. But the characteristic experience, the general and typical experience of the Christian, is that they should enjoy and be comforted and empowered by the Holy Spirit's real work of assurance. If a Christian is, for a period of time, in a slough of despond, or a period of doubt, they should know that they are still not alone, they are not abandoned, and in the mysteries of God some deeper work of grace is going on and their resolve to press forward in trust glorifies God in that tunnel of darkness. But take heart, this too will pass.

A couple of weeks ago I was invited to lecture, to respond to questions in a secular university class in religion. One of the students asked me, “Do you ever doubt? Do you wonder if this stuff you believe is really true?” I answered, “Of course I do. There are moments when I wonder if the entire thing might be a scam.” The students were amazed at my answer, and afterward I understood that it was the most memorable moment in the entire time. They had assumed that believers never have a whisper of doubt afterward. Sometimes I think that doubt is a function of how rigorously you are engaging the principalities and powers and the contrary worldviews of our time. If you're not at times thrown by the power of adversity and contrary plausibility structures, you're just not paying attention. And so, I think it's also important as we seek to be, not only faithful believers, but authentic believers, that we can freely acknowledge that there are times when faith wavers and doubt is real. But we can also attest to the fact that, without becoming fideistic, just choosing

to believe without any basis, we can weather these storms, and our faith can be reestablished and equipoise returned. But a healthy, a willing acknowledgement that periodic moments of doubt in the contests of life are a natural and legitimate part of our experience for which there is no shame.

Question 9:

What was the main point of Jesus' High Priestly Prayer?

Jesus understood that his people would face trials, temptations, doubts, adversities, and all sorts of other challenges. And in his role as our priest, he helps us through these times partly by praying and interceding for us. Perhaps the greatest example of this in Scripture is found in what Christians know as Jesus' High Priestly Prayer, recorded in John 17. What was the main point of Jesus' High Priestly Prayer?

Dr. Steve Harper

When Jesus prays in John 17, it's an extension and sort of a climax to the upper room discourse. Maybe he prayed in the upper room, maybe he was praying as they walked toward the Garden of Gethsemane. But it's definitely the bridge between 14, 15, 16 and 18. And I see it as Jesus' prayerful way of asking the Father to enable those apostles to overcome the world. Later, after he's raised from the dead, that's what he says to them: "Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." And he uses that phrase, uses the term "world," 19 times in that prayer. So I think the main point of the High Priestly Prayer is it's the prayerful request to the Father that God will so empower and indwell — John 15, "abide in me and I in you" — so indwell those apostles that they'll be able to overcome the world. Now, there are some clues in the prayer of how he hopes that they'll do that. The first way is we overcome the world by glorifying God instead of glorifying the world. Whenever we live in a way that honors God and pleases God, we've overcome the world in one sense of the word. Another way that he prays for them is that they will keep the Word. He talks about how he has given them the Word. He's been their teacher. He's been their rabbi. He has instructed them. Now he's praying that what's gotten into them will now become part of the way that they live. And what's interesting to me in that prayer is that at verse 9, the thing pivots into the apostles, but then when you get to verse 20, it's to those who will believe. So he's not just praying that the original twelve will overcome the world, he's praying that we'll overcome the world, too. And I think that's a great encouragement, that the same power that was available to those original apostles to do that is also available to us.

And as he works his way through that prayer about overcoming the world, he says several neat things, I think. One is if we do that we'll experience joy. Like Stanley Jones used to say, "For this I was made." There'll just be that inner sense that I'm doing what I was put on the earth to do, and there's great joy in that. He says also that we'll dwell in unity, because when you see other, you know, believers doing that, you find a oneness in that prayer. And he prays for that. "I pray that they may be one, Father, even as we are one." There's a kind of an ecumenism that happens in this

experience of living out our faith. We find other believers all around the world who are doing that same thing, and that's a wonderful thing. And then, of course, he prays that we'll live in love. But all of that is pointing to, I think, the main idea, and that is that by doing these things, we'll be overcomers; we will overcome the world.

Rev. Thad James, Jr.

Jesus knows that his time is short, that it's time for him, as he says, to go back to be with the Father when they were one before the beginning of the world. And in this time, Jesus says that I've kept all that you have given me except one, the son of perdition, so that Scripture may be fulfilled. So Jesus is really praying to the Father about the disciples, that he is going to leave them, they are going to be left behind, and now what's going to happen to them? As Jesus says, they're in the world as I was in the world, but not of the world, and now, Father, please keep them from the evil one. Protect them from this cosmos, from this evil age, and the things that are happening here. He says, I worked with them for 3, 3 ½, years to sanctify them, to bring them to this point. But now, I'm not going to be here with them, so Father, please keep them, continue this sanctification process because they're going to be facing great trials and great persecutions, and now how are they going to get through this? So, again, it's a prayer to God to take care of his disciples in preparation for the work and the trials, the persecutions, the martyrdom that is going to come before them, the things they're going to have to sacrifice to spread the gospel message of Jesus Christ.

Question 10:

How do modern Christians serve as a kingdom of priests?

When we speak about Jesus being our Great High Priest, one of the things we need to remember is that Jesus has also called us to be priests in his service. Part of our role as Christians is to extend Jesus' priestly ministry throughout the world. In fact, the apostle Peter said that, just like ancient Israel, the church is a kingdom of priests. But practically speaking, what does that mean? How do modern Christians serve as a kingdom of priests?

Dr. Dennis Johnson

In Genesis 12, God promises Abraham, not only that Abraham, who at that point of course was childless, that he would have a seed that could not be counted, but that through Abraham the nations would be blessed. And we see that working its way out through the Old Testament. Israel is called to be a people who are distinctive to the Lord and yet also a people who represent the Lord and his reign among the nations. They are called the "kingdom of priests" as they gather at Mount Sinai — Exodus 19. And priests stand in the presence of God and serve him, but they also have a role of standing on behalf of others and interceding for others. As Aaron and his sons did for Israel, so Israel is to do for the nations. Of course we know that Israel in so many ways failed, as we would have failed, to be that kingdom of priests, to be that avenue through which blessing would flow from God through Israel to all the nations.

But Jesus is the ultimate seed of Abraham, and now in Christ, the new covenant church is both the recipient of blessing through Jesus, the seed of Abraham, and the avenue of blessing among the nations.

So we stand as Israel stood in the presence of God to bring him glory, to adore him, to admire him, to speak of his marvelous deeds. And God speaks of Israel's calling in Isaiah 43 as the people whom he formed for himself to declare his praises. Peter picks up that very terminology in 1 Peter 2 and talks about our being called out of darkness into light that we might speak the excellences of the one who called us in Christ. Israel, we read, is called to be the Lord's witnesses among the nations, to declare what he's done, that he alone is the Savior and the God, the true and the living God. And we read now in the New Testament, in the book of Acts, that the apostles, and really in their ministry, the church, is called to be witnesses to the mighty deeds of God among the nations. So there is a great deal of continuity of purpose as we move from what Israel was called to be, sadly too often failed to be, what Christ has been perfectly, as the perfect worshiper of the Father on our behalf and the perfect witness to the nations on our behalf and now what he's making us. We're still imperfect, but by the grace of the Holy Spirit we can worship in the presence of the Father, and we can bear witness to the nations so the blessing promised to Abraham is flowing to the nations through Christ, from Christ, through the witness and the worship of his church.

Question 11:

If Jesus is our high priest, and the church is a kingdom of priests, what is the role of pastors?

It's common for Christians to see strong parallels between the modern pastor and the Old Testament office of Levitical priest. But we know that Jesus has replaced the Levites, and is now our Great High Priest. The New Testament also teaches that the entire church is a kingdom of priests. So, do we even need pastors? If Jesus is our high priest, and the church is a kingdom of priests, what is the role of pastors?

Dr. Peter Walker

The book of 1 Peter in the New Testament describes all believers as being priests, or it talks about the priesthood of all believers. It's a great phrase, and it's picking up a phrase from Exodus 19 where the ancient nation of Israel is described as, "You shall be," says God, "a nation of priests." I think that what that's saying is that, just as Israel was meant to be the place which if you looked at Israel you saw something of the character of God, priests were meant to, kind of, reflect the character of God. So now, all Christian believers are those who, if you look at them, you're meant to see some of the character of God. It's in that sense that we're all priests; we are part of the priesthood of believers reflecting God's glory to the wider world. But it is also true that the New Testament is quite clear that there is actually only one priest, in one sense, one high priest, and that's the language of Hebrews describing Jesus as our Great High Priest. Why is he our Great High Priest? Because he's given his life as the

one sacrifice for sins, and we can never do that, and it's very important that we do not think that we are somehow priests who are able to offer sacrifice or offer the sacrifice of Jesus again. No, one sacrifice, one priest.

What does that mean, then, for those that are called into church leadership? Well, it does mean to say that they are not priests, in that narrow sense of the word, offering sacrifices again. No, that is completely ruled out. But there is a need, as indeed any organization, to have people who are in charge, and God is not a God who encourages sheer chaos, and any community needs to have good order. And therefore it is appropriate — and we see this in the New Testament — for people to be elevated, if that's the right word, to positions of authority, that we're called to be submissive to those who are in authority. If that's true in the pagan world, how much more in the Christian church, we should be submissive to those that have leadership or who are over us in the Lord, to use a phrase from the New Testament. What, therefore, is the role of these people? Well, to serve their people, we're called to be servant leaders, but also to be, well, teachers. I think that's a key role. If actually Christ rules his church by his Word, then those who are called to be leaders in his church must, as it were, exercise Christ's rule of his church by the same means, which is, by his Word, which then shows you the importance in the New Testament of people being called to be teachers. It's those who have an ability to teach who are meant to be those who lead. There's also a role obviously for pastoral care, for being nice to people and caring for the flock, those who are Jesus' sheep. I would put the primary role as that of being a teacher, ruling God's people by his Word.

Dr. Simon Vibert

Well, the role of priest is described by the New Testament as being — applying to all believers — not so much the role of a sacrificer, but actually the role of an intercessor and one who ongoingly is able to approach God with confidence. And most Protestants have rejected the priestly language as being exclusively applied to the pastor. The pastor is a priest in the way every other Christian was, but the pastor is not there to make a sacrifice for sin. The pastor is there to teach people in the word, to encourage them in the faith and to lead them faithfully. So the word “priest” really is best described to all Christians rather than particularly to the person who leads the local congregation.

Dr. Stephen Wellum

It's important to think through the relationship between the entire church as a priesthood of all believers, and then what would be the point of having pastors? I mean, if we're all priests, why do we need them? As we work from the Old Testament to the New — the old covenant to the new — the nation of Israel was viewed as a priesthood. They had priests who represented them, but they were to also represent God to the entire world. As you work to the New Testament, the fulfillment of the priesthood is Christ as our Great High Priest. He is the one who offers himself for us. He is the one who takes our place. He is the one who intercedes for us. He then, by virtue of his work, makes us now priests. He brings us back to God. We then intercede for the world; we carry out our priestly work in terms of our restoration of

what it was meant to be as his image bearers, of carrying out the cultural mandate before us. The whole body of Christ are priests, yet that doesn't mean, then, that we don't have teachers, leaders in the church. All of us are priests; all of us know God, yet there are certain gifts that are given out to the church that are not all the same. Christ, as he ascends, pours out gifts of leaders, pastors, teachers, even though all of us know God directly, intercede directly before him, through our Lord Jesus Christ's priestly work. Yet there are those who in the body serve different purposes, and pastors have that unique role of leading and teaching and equipping the people of God and they're gifted in that way as fellow priests, but given a special role and a unique leadership role in the church.

Question 12:

How do Christians minister to God in his heavenly temple?

There are many implications of the fact that Christians are a kingdom of priests. Some of these have to do with the ways we relate to and serve other human beings. And others have to do with ministering to God himself, even in his heavenly temple. But how can mere creatures provide any benefit to our infinite, self-sufficient, omnipotent God? How do Christians minister to God in his heavenly temple?

Dr. Richard L. Pratt, Jr.

One of the most important things to know about the Bible's view of human beings is this: human beings were made to serve or to minister to God. I know we talk a lot about serving each other and ministering to each other, but from the beginning all the way to the end, the primary purpose of human beings is to minister or serve God. You can go all the way back to Genesis 2:15 where God said about Adam in the Garden that he was to work it and to take care of it. "To work it and to take care of it" was language that's used in the book of Numbers to refer to what priests and Levites do within the tabernacle. And so from the very beginning when God put humanity in his temple garden, the Garden of Eden, he commanded them to function as priests, in fact, royal priests. And as you go through the Bible, you discover that that's always been the case, that this is always the ideal for human beings, but that in the Old Testament, and then all the way up until the second coming of Christ, this activity takes place in relatively small areas, small pieces here and there.

I mean, for example, it started off with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, which was just one little piece of the earth, and you go on with Israel when they establish a tabernacle and they establish the temple in Jerusalem. Still, the ministering and serving of God by priests is something that takes place in a "holy" place or a "sanctified" place, but nevertheless, this is what human beings were supposed to do. It's why they were designed, why they were put on the planet. But the picture of the new world, when God has sanctified the entire earth and made it all his temple, made it all his holy presence, then this is going to be the job, a priestly job, a royal priestly job for every single human being that lives in that new world. You know, God told Israel in Exodus 19 that God had chosen them to be a royal priesthood, an imperial

priesthood, as it were. And that language in Exodus 19 is used by Peter in the New Testament to refer to the church. And so, this is the perspective that we're to have, not only on ancient Israel as a whole, but also on Christians as a whole, that we are a royal priesthood, a chosen people, a royal imperial priesthood.

Now, I know in many respects that sounds strange, because when we think of priests, what we normally think of is that priests do just a very limited number of things; they offer sacrifices, they pray, occasionally they sing, maybe they blow trumpets and are in choirs and things like that. But in reality, what the Bible is saying is that every legitimate, God-ordained activity on the earth, from the beginning to the end, has been an act of royal priesthood for those who serve God, and they do it in limited ways in the Old Testament, and even in the life of Jesus and in the Christian church today. But in the end, all of it will be such. And in fact, the Bible portrays the creation in many respects, in many places, as if it is God's temple. And, if you can imagine it, God's throne, Isaiah says, is in heaven and his footstool is on the earth, and around his footstool — of course this is talking about the Ark of the Covenant — around his footstool is a holy place where the high priest and the Levites, the special priests of the nation of Israel, serve him. And they do this by decorating, they do this by making sure sacrifices are ready, that plants are grown in the right way, that it's a beautiful place, a wondrous place for God's environment, and keeping evil and unclean things out. This is the kinds of things they do, so all their activity is like that.

But the Bible says that the whole floor of the earth, the whole earth is the floor of God's temple, and what God is doing is he's spreading out his influence, spreading out his holiness from that one little spot, the Garden of Eden in the beginning, later on the tabernacle as it moved, but then finally the temple as it was established. He's now moving out and cleaning the whole floor of his great palace, which is the earth. And this takes place through Israel to some extent. Of course, they failed and misery came from that. And Christ comes, and now he has set us on this task of cleaning the entire floor, and the way we do that is by serving God in every single area of life as an act of worship to him. It's not as if we have just some things that we do that are ministries to God, service of worship to him, and then other things that we do for ourselves or for no good reason at all. Rather, every single thing that we do as Christians is to be done heartily as unto the Lord because it is unto the Lord; whether it's your six days of work, whether it's sleeping, whether it's raising your children. Whatever it is, it is an activity of a royal priest because our job is to move the holiness of God throughout the world in anticipation of the new world to come when everyone who is left will live in this wondrously cleaned, holy, sanctified earth, and they will serve God forever as his royal priests.

Dr. K. Erik Thoennes

It may seem strange to talk about ministering to God, or blessing God, when we realize that he's independent, he has no unmet needs, he's completely self-sufficient. But in his relationship with us, we can bring him joy in the way we obey him or worship him, or live out our faithfulness. And so daily faithfulness, daily obedience and worship of God actually blesses God and brings delight to his heart. And that's

really the primary motivation for living as a Christian. It's not so we don't have bad things happen to us or that God will get mad at us, but that we are able to bring delight to the heart of our Creator in the way we live.

Dr. Greg Perry

What we see in the ministry of Christians on the earth in their worship and in their witness in society is bringing honor and acclamation to the true King, to the true Creator, the true Savior who has brought blessings to our cities and to our lives and honoring him with their life, not only with their worship but with their witness and with their wealth, and the ways that they would benefit the city themselves, to bring this sort of honor to Jesus as the Lord, the *Kurios*, instead of falsely attributing it to others is to bring him true honor as the one who has created us and who has redeemed us.

Dr. William Ury

The activities of Christians this side of heaven minister to God in his temple in the reality of heaven, I think, in some unique ways. The first thing is, it's a beautiful thing as a Christian to realize there is not a dualism in our theology, that what we do on earth is directly connected to that which is spiritual, that which is heavenly. We can't see that world yet. We don't know it like we will know it someday, but it's no less real. So the way we live, the way we act, is a profound statement about our view of reality, that what is not seen is, in many ways, more real than what we do see; in fact, it is the most real. So, our worship life, our our obedience to the Lord's commandments, doing what we know is right from the Scripture, is not something that we're doing to earn his love. It's a response to his grace that is pouring over our lives at every point. So everything we do ought to be seen as ministry unto God and connected to that reality. And for many Christians, including myself, it's a difficult thing because we live in time, we don't understand an eternal reality, and so we think about days and weeks and months and don't connect that to the future; whereas, the Christian doctrine of hope connects everything we do with the future so that in a sense — and it's hard to comprehend — the future is already present in Christ. He's already offered to us the future. We're going to access that more and more realistically as we move into the *eschaton*, the last things, but right now we can live in the reality of that beauty. So it produces a massive amount of hope in the Christian life, and joy, and peace, because his victory can be known to us in the now. We'll experience it more fully one day, but it makes a difference in everything we do in the present.

Human beings were made to serve God. And we need his special, holy presence in our lives. But because we're sinful, we can't enter God's presence on our own. We need a mediator to intercede for us. We need a priest; we need Jesus. As our Great High Priest, Jesus brings us into God's presence and even anoints us as his fellow priests. As a result, we now have the privilege of serving God's people on earth, and of ministering to him in his heavenly temple. And that's a ministry we'll continue forever, even in the new heavens and new earth.

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