

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

Systematic Theology Series

CHRISTOLOGY

The Doctrine of the Person and Work of Christ

UNIT 6: THE THREEFOLD OFFICE OF CHRIST — PROPHET, PRIEST, AND KING

Lesson 18

Christ as Priest

The Mediator Who Offers Himself

Both Offerer and Offering — The Great High Priest

Key Texts: Psalm 110:4; Hebrews 7:23–28; 9:11–14; 10:10–14; Romans 8:34; 1 John 2:1

“He Is Able to Save Forever Those Who Draw Near to God Through Him”

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SERIES VERSE

*“For we do not preach ourselves
but Christ Jesus as Lord,
and ourselves as your bond-servants
on account of Jesus.”*

2 CORINTHIANS 4:5, NASB 1995

INTRODUCTION

Of the three offices of the *munus triplex*, the priestly office stands at the theological center, the pivot around which the entire structure of the gospel turns. The prophetic office illumines the meaning of the priestly work; the kingly office applies and protects the benefits of the priestly sacrifice; but it is the priestly office itself that addresses the most fundamental of the three dimensions of the human problem: the objective guilt of those who have violated the law of the infinitely holy God and who stand under the divine condemnation that the law pronounces. Without the priestly work of Christ, without the atoning sacrifice that removes guilt, turns away divine wrath, and opens the way into the divine presence, the prophetic revelation would be news of a salvation that could not be achieved, and the kingly reign would be the exercise of a sovereignty from which sinners were excluded by their own guilt. It is the priestly office that makes the access possible, the forgiveness actual, and the adoption real.

The priestly office of Christ is the subject of the most extensive and most theologically concentrated treatment in the New Testament: the letter to the Hebrews. Hebrews is, in its essential structure, a sustained argument for the superiority of Christ's high priesthood over the Aaronic priesthood of the Mosaic covenant, a superiority demonstrated by the superiority of the Priest Himself (sinless, permanent, Melchizedekian in order), the superiority of the sacrifice (once-for-all, infinitely sufficient, offered in the heavenly sanctuary rather than the earthly copy), and the superiority of the covenant (new, better, established on better promises). The pastoral purpose of this argument is made explicit in Hebrews 4:16: "Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (NASB 1995). The theology of the priestly office is in the service of the pastoral call to confident approach: those who understand what Christ has accomplished as their High Priest are those who can approach the throne of the holy God without terror and without shame.

This lesson works through the priestly office of Christ under six headings: the Levitical priesthood as type and its built-in limitations, the Melchizedekian priesthood of Christ and its superiority over the Aaronic (Psalm 110:4 and Hebrews 7), the uniqueness of Christ as both offerer and offering (Hebrews 9:11–14), the once-for-all sufficiency of His sacrifice (Hebrews 10:10–14), the fourfold benefit of the priestly work (propitiation, expiation, reconciliation, and redemption), and the continuing intercessory ministry of the exalted High Priest (Hebrews 7:25; Romans 8:34; 1 John 2:1). Together these dimensions constitute the most comprehensive and the most personally consoling account of what God has done for sinners in the priestly work of His Son.

I. THE LEVITICAL PRIESTHOOD AS TYPE: ANTICIPATION AND LIMITATION

Every Old Testament Sacrifice Was a Shadow Pointing Forward to the One Sufficient Offering

A. The Function and Structure of the Levitical Priesthood

The Levitical priesthood established at Sinai (Exodus 28–29; Leviticus 1–16) was the divinely appointed system of mediation between the holy God and the sinful covenant people. The priests, the sons of Aaron, consecrated by anointing with oil and the sprinkling of sacrificial blood, served at the altar, offered the daily sacrifices prescribed by the law, and performed the annual rituals of purification that maintained the covenant relationship between YHWH and Israel. At the head of the priestly hierarchy stood the high priest, whose unique function included entrance into the Most Holy Place on the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) with the blood of the sin offering for the whole community (Leviticus 16). The Day of Atonement was the liturgical climax of the entire Levitical system: the one day in the year when the accumulated guilt of the covenant people was addressed most directly, when the high priest stood closest to the divine presence, and when the covering of sin was most explicitly enacted.

The theological significance of the Levitical system was entirely typological: every sacrifice, every sprinkling of blood, every Day of Atonement ritual was a divinely ordained sign pointing beyond itself to the one sacrifice that would actually accomplish what the Levitical sacrifices could only signify. Hebrews 10:1–4 states this explicitly: “For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things, can never, by the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near. Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, because the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have had consciousness of sins? But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins year by year. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins” (NASB 1995). The annual repetition of the Day of Atonement was not evidence of its sufficiency but of its insufficiency: if the sacrifice had genuinely and permanently removed sin, there would have been no need to repeat it. The repetition was a pedagogical reminder that the real and final atonement had not yet been accomplished.

B. The Built-In Limitations of the Aaronic Priesthood

The author of Hebrews identifies three specific limitations of the Aaronic priesthood that Christ’s priestly work permanently overcomes. First, the Aaronic priests were themselves sinful: “He does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the sins of the people, because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself” (Hebrews 7:27, NASB 1995). A sinful priest cannot provide a perfectly sufficient atonement; he requires atonement for himself before he can offer atonement for others, and the guilt of his own sin taints his service as a mediator. Second, the Aaronic priests were mortal: “The former priests, on the one hand, existed in

greater numbers because they were prevented by death from continuing” (Hebrews 7:23, NASB 1995). Every high priest who died left the priestly ministry interrupted, and the appointment of a successor was an implicit acknowledgment that no individual Aaronic priest could provide the permanent, continuous mediation that the covenant people needed. Third, the blood of animals could not take away sins (Hebrews 10:4): the ontological gap between the offered animal and the offended divine holiness was too great for any animal sacrifice to bridge. Only a sacrifice of infinite value could satisfy the demands of infinite divine justice, and the sacrificial animals, however carefully prescribed, were finite creatures whose deaths could only signify, not accomplish, the atonement they symbolized.

II. THE MELCHIZEDEKIAN PRIESTHOOD: SUPERIOR TO AARON BY DIVINE OATH

Psalm 110:4 and the Permanent, Indestructible Priesthood of Christ

A. Melchizedek and the Pattern He Establishes

The author of Hebrews grounds the superiority of Christ’s priesthood over the Aaronic in a typological argument drawn from Genesis 14:18–20 and Psalm 110:4. Melchizedek, the king of Salem and “priest of God Most High” (Genesis 14:18, NASB 1995), appears suddenly in the narrative of Genesis, receives tithes from Abraham, blesses Abraham, and then disappears from the text with no genealogy, no account of his birth, and no record of his death. The author of Hebrews treats this narrative silence not as a historical lacuna but as a divinely intended typological feature: “Without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, he remains a priest perpetually” (Hebrews 7:3, NASB 1995). Melchizedek’s priesthood is permanent and non-hereditary in the text, it is not established by genealogical descent from a particular tribe, it is not limited by the mortality of the priest, and it is not terminated by any recorded event. These textual features make him the fitting type of the one whose priesthood is genuinely permanent because He “lives forever” (Hebrews 7:24, NASB 1995).

The typological argument reaches its christological climax in Psalm 110:4, which the author of Hebrews identifies as the divine oath that establishes Christ’s Melchizedekian priesthood: “The Lord has sworn and will not change His mind, ‘You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek’” (NASB 1995). The divine oath is the key: the Aaronic priesthood was established by divine ordinance but not confirmed by divine oath; the Melchizedekian priesthood of Christ is established by the divine oath of the Father, which is irrevocable and eternal. “By so much also Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant” (Hebrews 7:22, NASB 1995), the priesthood guaranteed by oath is the priesthood that guarantees the new covenant, and the new covenant

guaranteed by the oath-confirmed priesthood is “better” than the old covenant in precisely the ways that Christ’s priesthood is better than Aaron’s.

B. The Three Superiorities of Christ’s Melchizedekian Priesthood

Hebrews 7:23–28 identifies three specific superiorities of Christ’s priesthood over the Aaronic. First, Christ’s priesthood is permanent: “but He, on the other hand, because He continues forever, holds His priesthood permanently” (v. 24, NASB 1995). The word translated “permanently” (ἀπαράβατον, *aparabaton*) means “non-transferable” or “inviolable”, it cannot be handed on to a successor because its holder never dies. The perpetual priestly ministry of Christ is the direct consequence of His resurrection life: the one who was dead and is alive forevermore (Revelation 1:18) holds an indestructible priesthood precisely because His life is indestructible. Second, Christ’s priesthood is sinless: “For it was fitting for us to have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens; who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins” (vv. 26–27, NASB 1995). Third, Christ’s priesthood is perfectly efficacious: His one offering accomplishes permanently and completely what the repeated Aaronic sacrifices could only partially and temporarily signify.

“He is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.”

HEBREWS 7:25, NASB 1995

III. BOTH OFFERER AND OFFERING: THE UNIQUENESS OF CHRIST’S PRIESTLY SACRIFICE

The One Who Presents the Sacrifice and the Sacrifice Itself Are the Same Person

A. The Levitical Distinction and Its Christological Transcendence

In the Levitical system, the distinction between the priest and the sacrifice was absolute and irremovable: the priest offered the sacrifice, but the sacrifice was an animal, a bull, a goat, a lamb, a bird, that was distinct from the priest who offered it. The priest was the agent of the offering; the animal was the substance of the offering; and the two were necessarily different kinds of beings. The priest could identify with the animal symbolically, the laying of hands on the head of the sacrifice (Leviticus 1:4; 16:21) was the ritual expression of identification, the transfer of guilt from the offerer to the offered, but the identification was symbolic rather than ontological. The priest did not die in the offering; the animal died instead of the priest and instead of the worshipper.

Christ transcends this distinction in the most radical possible way: He is simultaneously the Priest who offers and the Lamb who is offered. John the Baptist’s identification of Jesus as “the Lamb of

God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29, NASB 1995) is the sacrificial identification; the designation of Jesus as the High Priest throughout Hebrews is the priestly identification. Both are true simultaneously of the same Person, and their simultaneous truth is the theological key to the infinite sufficiency of the atonement. The priest who offers is God the Son, of infinite divine worth; the sacrifice that is offered is also God the Son, of infinite divine worth; and the offering of an infinitely worthy sacrifice by an infinitely worthy priest produces an atonement of infinite value and infinite efficacy. The Levitical system could not produce this: it could provide an animal of finite worth offered by a sinful priest of finite worth, producing a covering of limited and temporary effect. Christ alone provides the self-offering of the infinite and sinless Son of God, producing an atonement of permanently sufficient and infinite effect.

B. Hebrews 9:11–14: The Heavenly Sanctuary and the Better Blood

Hebrews 9:11–14 develops the contrast between the Levitical and the Christological priesthoods in terms of the sanctuary, the sacrifice, and the effect: “But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption” (NASB 1995). The contrast is triple: the sanctuary (the greater and more perfect heavenly tabernacle vs. the earthly copy), the blood (His own blood vs. the blood of goats and calves), and the effect (eternal redemption obtained once for all vs. the annual repetition of the Levitical atonement). The earthly tabernacle and temple were copies and shadows of the heavenly reality (Hebrews 8:5); when Christ entered the heavenly sanctuary with His own blood, He entered the true reality of which the Levitical sanctuary was always the anticipatory image.

The comparison of Hebrews 9:13–14 presses the argument to its logical conclusion: “For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” (NASB 1995). The argument is a *fortiori*: if the Levitical cleansing, with its animal blood and its limited, external, ceremonial effect, was genuinely effective for the purposes it was designed to serve (the ritual purity of the worshipper within the covenant community), how much more effective must the blood of Christ be, offered not by a sinful priest through finite animal blood but by the eternal Son through the eternal Spirit, without blemish, in the heavenly sanctuary? The blood of Christ cleanses the conscience, not merely the ritual status but the deepest interior dimension of the person, because it was offered by the one who is in Himself of infinite worth and infinite holiness.

IV. THE ONCE-FOR-ALL SACRIFICE: SUFFICIENT, COMPLETE, AND NEVER TO BE REPEATED

*Hebrews 10:10–14 and the Permanent Efficacy of the One Offering***A. The “Once for All” of the Priestly Sacrifice**

One of the most theologically significant words in the entire vocabulary of the priestly work of Christ is the Greek adverb ἅπαξ (*hapax*) or ἐφάπαξ (*ephapax*), meaning “once for all” or “once and for all time.” It appears repeatedly in Hebrews’ treatment of Christ’s priestly sacrifice (Hebrews 7:27; 9:12; 9:26; 9:28; 10:10) and serves as the sharpest possible contrast with the repeated daily and annual sacrifices of the Levitical system. The author of Hebrews is emphatic: the sacrifice of Christ is not one offering in a series that will be repeated as needed; it is the one, complete, permanently sufficient offering that exhausts the divine requirement for the sins of all for whom it was offered and that will never need to be, and cannot be, repeated.

Hebrews 10:10–14 provides the fullest statement of the once-for-all character and its permanent efficacy: “By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time onward until His enemies be made a footstool for His feet. For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified” (NASB 1995). The contrast between the standing priest (ἱστάμενος, *histāmenos*, perpetually standing at the altar because his work is never done) and the seated Christ (ἐκάθισεν, *ekathisen*, sat down because His work is finished) is among the most vivid and the most theologically precise images in all of Hebrews. The sitting of Christ is the posture of completed work: He offered the one, sufficient, permanent sacrifice, and then He sat down. There is nothing more to offer; the sacrifice is infinitely sufficient; the atonement is accomplished once and for all.

B. The Finished Work and Its Pastoral Significance

The once-for-all character of Christ’s sacrifice has immediate and far-reaching pastoral implications. It means that the ground of the believer’s standing before God is not a process still being completed but an event already accomplished: “It is finished” (John 19:30, NASB 1995). The word τετέλεσται (*tetelestai*), the perfect passive of τελεόω (*teleoo*), “to complete,” “to accomplish,” “to bring to its ordained end,” is the cry of the completing High Priest, the declaration that the sacrifice is complete, the work is done, the debt is paid, the guilt is borne, and the divine requirement is fully satisfied. No subsequent human act, no further offering, no penitential practice, no moral achievement, no religious performance, can add to, supplement, or improve upon what Christ accomplished on the cross. The pastoral comfort of this completeness is immense: the believer’s access to God does not depend on the continuing quality of their own spiritual performance but on the completed, permanent, infinitely sufficient priestly work of the one who sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

This is also the theological basis for the Protestant rejection of the Roman Catholic doctrine of the Mass as a re-presentation or repetition of the sacrifice of Christ. Hebrews' insistence on the ephapax character of the sacrifice, once and for all, not to be repeated, is the direct refutation of any doctrine that requires the sacrifice of Christ to be offered again, even in an unbloody or re-presentational form. The sacrifice was offered once; its effects are permanent; and the priestly work is complete. The celebration of the Lord's Supper, rightly understood, is not a re-offering of the sacrifice but a memorial of the one completed sacrifice, a proclamation of the Lord's death "until He comes" (1 Corinthians 11:26, NASB 1995), and a participation in the benefits of the one priestly work that Christ accomplished and then sat down.

V. THE FOURFOLD BENEFIT: PROPITIATION, EXPIATION, RECONCILIATION, AND REDEMPTION

The Comprehensive Dimensions of What the Priestly Sacrifice Accomplished

A. Propitiation: The Turning Away of Divine Wrath

The priestly sacrifice of Christ accomplishes four distinct but related benefits for those for whom it was offered. The first and most fundamental is propitiation: the turning away of the divine wrath against sin. Romans 3:25 declares that God "displayed publicly" Christ "as a propitiation in His blood through faith" (NASB 1995); 1 John 4:10 grounds the love of God in the propitiatory sending of the Son: "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (NASB 1995). The Greek word translated "propitiation" (ἱλασμός, *hilasmos*; related: ἱλαστήριον, *hilastērion*, Romans 3:25) refers to the satisfaction of the divine wrath against sin through the provision of the appropriate sacrifice, the offering that meets the demands of divine justice and turns aside the penalty that sin deserves.

The concept of propitiation has been contested in modern biblical studies: C.H. Dodd argued that the Greek terms mean "expiation" (the removal of sin) rather than "propitiation" (the appeasement of wrath), and that the notion of the wrath of God requires demythologization in light of the biblical depiction of God as love. The exegetical and theological response, developed most fully by Leon Morris and Roger Nicole, demonstrates that the propitiation-language of the New Testament is the direct heir of the Old Testament's sacrificial system, a system in which the blood of the sacrifice specifically "atones for" (covers, satisfies, turns aside the judgment of) the holy God who would otherwise punish the violator of His covenant. The divine wrath is not a primitive anthropomorphism to be explained away but the holy God's necessary, personal, righteous response to sin, and the priestly sacrifice of Christ is the means by which that response is fully and permanently satisfied on behalf of the elect.

B. Expiation, Reconciliation, and Redemption

The second benefit is expiation: the removal of the guilt and defilement of sin from the offender. Where propitiation is God-ward (the divine wrath is turned away), expiation is sin-ward (the sin itself is removed). Hebrews 9:14 describes the cleansing of the conscience from “dead works” as the experiential dimension of the expiation that Christ’s blood effects; 1 John 1:7 declares that “the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin” (NASB 1995). The comprehensive scope of the expiation is captured in the “all sin” (πάσης ἀμαρτίας, *pasēs hamartias*), not some sins, not the lesser sins, but all sin, including the sins committed after the new birth that might otherwise raise the question of whether the believer has forfeited the priestly benefit.

The third benefit is reconciliation: the restoration of the broken relationship between the holy God and the sinful person. 2 Corinthians 5:18–21 is the primary Pauline text: “God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them” (v. 19, NASB 1995). The reconciliation is God-initiated, Christ-accomplished, and Spirit-applied: the estrangement produced by sin is overcome not by human initiative but by the divine initiative of the one who sends His Son to be the propitiation for sin and thereby opens the way for the restoration of fellowship. The fourth benefit is redemption: the purchase of the enslaved out of the bondage from which they could not free themselves. Ephesians 1:7 declares that “in Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace” (NASB 1995); Revelation 5:9 expresses it doxologically in the song of the Lamb’s heavenly worshippers: “For You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation” (NASB 1995). The priestly blood purchases the freedom of those who were enslaved; the price paid is the infinite worth of the Son’s own blood; and the comprehensiveness of the purchase, “from every tribe and tongue and people and nation”, declares the universal scope of the redemption among the elect of God.

VI. THE CONTINUING INTERCESSION: HE ALWAYS LIVES TO MAKE INTERCESSION

The Priestly Ministry Does Not End at the Cross, It Continues at the Right Hand of the Father

The priestly work of Christ does not conclude at the cross and the empty tomb, however complete and sufficient the atoning sacrifice accomplished there. The risen and ascended Christ continues His priestly ministry at the right hand of the Father in the form of perpetual intercession, the continuous, personal, advocacy of the exalted High Priest for His people before the divine throne. Hebrews 7:25 states the doctrine with pastoral magnificence: “Hence, also, He is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them” (NASB 1995). The ground of the permanent saving is the permanent intercession: “He always lives” (πάντοτε ζῶν,

pantote zōn), the indestructible resurrection life of the exalted High Priest is the guarantee of the unceasing intercession, which is itself the guarantee of the permanent salvation of those who draw near through Him.

Romans 8:34 places the intercession within the comprehensive Trinitarian context of the believer's security: "Who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us" (NASB 1995). The fourfold description of the interceding Christ, died, raised, at the right hand of God, interceding, is a compressed account of the entire priestly work: the death (the sacrifice), the resurrection (the vindication of the sacrifice), the session (the completed work presented before the Father), and the intercession (the ongoing advocacy on behalf of the people He has redeemed). Each element supports and requires the others: the death without the resurrection would leave the sacrifice unvindicated; the resurrection without the session would leave the priestly work unrepresented; the session without the intercession would leave the benefits of the sacrifice unapplied to specific people in specific needs. The continuing intercession is the priestly work in its post-resurrection, post-ascension, permanently efficacious form.

1 John 2:1 brings the intercession into its most directly pastoral application: "My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (NASB 1995). The word translated "Advocate" (παράκλητον, parāklēton, Paraclete) is the same word used for the Holy Spirit in John 14:16, 26 and John 16:7. The Advocate is the one who stands alongside the defendant in the legal proceedings, who pleads the defendant's case, who presents the grounds of acquittal, who ensures that the verdict of condemnation does not fall on the one he represents. Jesus Christ the righteous is the Advocate before the Father for every believer who sins, and the grounds of His advocacy are not the believer's own righteousness (which has failed) but His own: "Jesus Christ the righteous" (Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν δίκαιον, Iēsoun Christon dikaion). The righteousness that qualifies the Advocate is His own; the advocacy He provides is the presentation of His completed atonement as the ground of the Father's continued acceptance of those who have sinned after their new birth.

The pastoral comfort of the continuing intercession is among the most personally consoling truths in the entire gospel. At this very moment, as the believer reads these words, as she struggles with the sin that so easily entangles, as he faces the temptation that presses with its full force, the Son of God is at the right hand of the Father speaking on their behalf. The atonement He accomplished is the ground of the advocacy He provides; the resurrection life He lives is the guarantee that the advocacy never ceases; and the righteousness He possesses is the qualification that makes His case on their behalf unanswerable. "He always lives to make intercession for them." To Him be glory forever and ever. Amen.

Key Texts: Psalm 110:4; Leviticus 16:1–34; Hebrews 7:23–28; 9:11–14; 10:1–14; Romans 3:25; 1 John 4:10; 2 Corinthians 5:18–21; Ephesians 1:7; Romans 8:34; 1 John 2:1; Hebrews 4:14–16; John 19:30

THEOLOGICAL TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Term	Definition
Priestly Office	The second dimension of the munus triplex: Christ’s office as the divinely appointed mediator who stands between the holy God and sinful humanity, offering the sacrifice that removes guilt, turns away divine wrath, and restores access to the divine presence. In the Old Testament, the priestly office was held by the Aaronic priests, whose sacrifices were typological signs pointing forward to the one sufficient offering that Christ would provide. Christ fulfills this office supremely as the one High Priest who is simultaneously the offerer (the priestly agent) and the offering (the sacrificial substance), rendering a once-for-all atonement of infinite value and continuing the priestly work in the form of perpetual intercession at the right hand of the Father.
Propitiation	The satisfaction of the divine wrath against sin through the provision of the appropriate sacrifice. The Greek terms <i>hilasmos</i> (1 John 2:2; 4:10) and <i>hilastērion</i> (Romans 3:25) describe Christ’s death as the sacrifice that turns away the divine wrath that sin deserves. Distinguished from expiation (the removal of sin from the offender) as God-ward in its primary reference: propitiation addresses the divine response to sin (wrath satisfied) while expiation addresses the human condition of sin (guilt removed). The propitiation is the foundation of the free offer of the gospel: God can be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus (Romans 3:26) because the wrath against their sin has been fully satisfied in the priestly sacrifice of His Son.
Expiation	The removal of the guilt and defilement of sin from the offender, accomplished by the priestly sacrifice of Christ. Distinct from propitiation (God-ward) as sin-ward in its reference: where propitiation turns away the divine wrath, expiation removes the sin that provoked it. Hebrews 9:14 describes the cleansing of the conscience from ‘dead works’ as the experiential dimension of the expiation; 1 John 1:7 declares that ‘the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.’ The comprehensive scope of the expiation (‘all sin’) includes not only the sins committed before the new birth but all subsequent failures, ensuring that the ongoing sinfulness of the believer does not forfeit the priestly benefit.
Reconciliation	The restoration of the broken relationship between the holy God and the sinful person, accomplished by the priestly death of Christ. 2 Corinthians 5:18–21 is the primary Pauline text: ‘God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them.’ Reconciliation is God-initiated,

Term	Definition
	<p>Christ-accomplished, and Spirit-applied: the estrangement produced by sin is overcome not by human initiative but by the divine initiative of the sending Father. The ministry of reconciliation entrusted to the apostles (v. 18) and through them to the church is the proclamation of the reconciliation accomplished in Christ, calling those who are still alienated to be reconciled to the God who has already reconciled Himself to them in the cross.</p>
Redemption	<p>The purchase of the enslaved out of the bondage to sin, death, and the devil from which they could not free themselves, accomplished by the priestly blood of Christ. Ephesians 1:7 ('in Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses') and Revelation 5:9 ('You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation') are the primary New Testament texts. The metaphor is commercial (a purchase price is paid) and liberating (the enslaved are freed): the price of redemption is the blood of Christ, which is of infinite worth because of the infinite dignity of the one who shed it, and the scope of the redemption is the entire elect community gathered from every nation.</p>
Ephapax	<p>Greek: 'once for all' or 'once and for all time.' Used repeatedly in Hebrews to characterize the priestly sacrifice of Christ as non-repeatable and permanently sufficient (Hebrews 7:27; 9:12; 10:10). The ephapax character of the sacrifice is the sharpest possible contrast with the repeated daily and annual sacrifices of the Levitical system: those repeated offerings were evidence of their own insufficiency, since a permanently effective sacrifice would not need to be repeated. Christ's one offering accomplished permanently what the Levitical sacrifices could only temporarily and partially signify. The pastoral significance is immense: the ground of the believer's standing before God is not a process being completed but an event fully accomplished.</p>
Melchizedek / Melchizedekian Priesthood	<p>Melchizedek is the enigmatic priest-king of Salem (Genesis 14:18–20) who serves as the type of Christ's priesthood in Hebrews 5–7. The divine oath of Psalm 110:4 ('You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek') establishes that the Messiah's priesthood is not Aaronic (hereditary, limited by mortality, repeatedly interrupted by the death of its ministers) but Melchizedekian (established by divine oath, permanent, indestructible). The superiority of the Melchizedekian over the Aaronic priesthood is demonstrated in Hebrews 7 by the fact that Abraham, the ancestor of Levi and Aaron, paid tithes to Melchizedek, thereby acknowledging the greater dignity of Melchizedek's priesthood.</p>
Aparabaton	<p>Greek: 'non-transferable,' 'permanent,' 'inviolable.' Used in Hebrews 7:24 to describe the character of Christ's priesthood: 'but He, on the other hand, because He continues forever, holds His priesthood permanently (aparabaton).' The word implies that the priesthood cannot be transferred to a successor because its holder never dies. The permanence of Christ's priesthood</p>

Term	Definition
	<p>is grounded in the indestructibility of His resurrection life, the one who was dead and is alive forevermore (Revelation 1:18) holds an aparabaton priesthood precisely because His life is indestructible. This permanent priesthood is the ground of the 'save forever' of Hebrews 7:25.</p>
<p>Tetelestai</p>	<p>Greek: perfect passive of teleoo ('to complete,' 'to accomplish,' 'to bring to its ordained end'). Christ's final word from the cross in John 19:30: 'It is finished.' The perfect tense indicates a completed action with abiding results: the sacrifice has been completed, and the completion is permanent. In first-century commercial usage, tetelestai was written across a paid debt, 'paid in full.' In the priestly context of Christ's death, it is the declaration of the completing High Priest that the divine requirement for the sins of His people has been fully satisfied. No subsequent human act can add to, supplement, or improve upon what Christ accomplished on the cross in this single, complete, permanently sufficient priestly offering.</p>
<p>Paraklēton / Advocate</p>	<p>Greek: 'one called alongside,' 'advocate,' 'helper.' Used in 1 John 2:1 for Christ as the Advocate ('we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous') and in John 14:16, 26; 16:7 for the Holy Spirit as the other Paraclete sent in Christ's name. The Advocate is the one who stands alongside the defendant in legal proceedings, pleading the defendant's case before the judge. Christ's advocacy before the Father is the present-tense expression of His priestly intercession: He presents His completed atonement as the ground of the Father's continued acceptance of those who sin after the new birth. The righteousness that qualifies the Advocate is His own ('Jesus Christ the righteous'), not the believer's.</p>

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

A. For the Mind: What Must We Believe?

We must believe that the priestly work of Christ is the most fundamental of the three offices in the sense that it addresses the most foundational of the three dimensions of the human problem: objective guilt before the holy God. The prophetic word illumines the meaning of the priestly sacrifice; the kingly power applies its benefits; but without the priestly sacrifice itself, there is no forgiveness, no access to God, no adoption, and no salvation. The believer who understands the priestly office will understand the gospel more deeply, pray with greater confidence, approach the Lord's Table with fuller appreciation, and face the prospect of judgment with the specific, grounded assurance that the One who will judge is also the One who has already borne the judgment for those who are in Him.

We must also believe that the once-for-all character of Christ's sacrifice is the permanent ground of the believer's acceptance before God, that *tetelestai* means what it says, that the work is finished, that the debt is paid, and that no subsequent failure of the believer's spiritual performance can diminish or forfeit the priestly benefit that Christ secured by His one, complete, sufficient offering. The congregation that has genuinely grasped the *ephapax* will be a congregation that approaches the Lord's Supper not with anxious introspection about whether they are worthy but with the thankful, confident reception of those who know that their worthiness is entirely in the one who sat down.

B. For the Heart: What Must We Feel and Desire?

Let the continuing intercession of Christ become the most personally consoling reality in your daily prayer life. At this very moment, before you read another word of this lesson, the Son of God is at the right hand of the Father speaking on behalf of everyone who is in Him. He is presenting His completed atonement as the ground of your acceptance. He is advocating with the righteousness that is His own. He is making intercession with the sympathy of one who has been where you are, in the flesh, with loud crying and tears. The comfort of the continuing intercession is not a theological abstraction; it is the warm, specific, personal reality of being represented before the divine throne by the one who loves you and gave Himself for you and who will never, ever stop living to make intercession for you.

Desire a congregation that worships at the Lord's Table with a depth and a joy proportional to what the Table actually commemorates and proclaims. Many evangelical congregations approach the Lord's Supper with a solemnity that is theologically appropriate but with a joy that is theologically insufficient. The cross is the most terrible event in the history of the universe, and it is the most wonderful. The supper proclaims the death of the Lord until He comes; and the one who died and sat down is the one who comes again in glory. Let the full weight of what Christ accomplished as Priest shape the affective register of the congregation's communion: profound, reverent, grateful, and joyful with a joy that is commensurate with the infinite worth of the one who sat down.

C. For the Hands: What Must We Do?

- Preach the four benefits of the priestly sacrifice, propitiation, expiation, reconciliation, and redemption, with specific attention to each and without collapsing them into one another. Each benefit addresses a different dimension of the human problem and a different dimension of the atonement's comprehensive scope. The congregation that understands all four will have a richer, more specific, and more personally applicable understanding of what Christ accomplished than the congregation that knows only 'forgiveness.'
- Preach from the book of Hebrews as a sustained engagement with the priestly Christology it develops. Hebrews is the New Testament's most extended treatment of the priestly office, and its pastoral purpose, producing the confident approach to the throne of grace described in Hebrews 4:16 and 10:19–22, is exactly the pastoral purpose that the sermon series should

serve. A series through chapters 7–10 of Hebrews would give the congregation the most concentrated biblical treatment of the priestly office available anywhere in the New Testament.

- Address the Roman Catholic doctrine of the Mass directly and charitably in your teaching context. The once-for-all character of Christ's sacrifice (the ephapax of Hebrews) is the clearest biblical basis for the Protestant insistence that the Mass as a re-offering or re-representation of the sacrifice of Christ is theologically untenable. Engage this question with charity, Roman Catholic believers who hold this doctrine are not, as a rule, deliberately distorting the gospel; they are the heirs of a tradition that has not adequately received the Hebrews argument. Present the biblical case clearly and graciously, and help your congregation understand the pastoral stakes of the once-for-all doctrine.
- Use 1 John 2:1 in your pastoral care of those who struggle with the guilt of post-conversion sin. The person who is weighed down by the guilt of sins committed after their new birth needs to hear that the Advocate is not absent from their case, that the atonement He accomplished is sufficient for every sin including this one, and that the righteousness He possesses, not theirs, His, is the ground on which He presents their case before the Father. The pastoral conversation that brings 1 John 2:1 to bear on a specific situation of post-conversion guilt is one of the most personally transforming uses of the priestly Christology available.
- Reflect the fourfold benefit in the prayers you pray in corporate worship. The prayers of the gathered community should reflect the fullness of what Christ has accomplished as Priest: thanksgiving for propitiation (the wrath is turned away), celebration of expiation (the sin is removed), praise for reconciliation (the fellowship is restored), and joy in redemption (the enslaved are free). Worship that is shaped by the comprehensive priestly work of Christ will be worship that is more theologically rich, more personally engaging, and more doxologically complete than worship that addresses only one or two of the benefits.

STUDY AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

OPENING QUESTION

1. Hebrews 4:16 invites the believer to 'draw near with confidence to the throne of grace.' How confident do you actually feel in your approach to God in prayer? Is your confidence in prayer grounded in the specific reality of Christ's priestly work, in the completed sacrifice, the continuing intercession, and the advocacy of the righteous Advocate, or is it grounded more diffusely in a general sense of divine benevolence? How does a deeper understanding of the priestly office change the specific grounds of your confidence in prayer?

OBSERVATION QUESTIONS (WHAT DO THE TEXTS SAY?)

- 2.** Read Hebrews 7:23–28. Identify the three specific ways in which Christ’s priesthood is superior to the Aaronic: the permanence of His priesthood (v. 24), the sinlessness of His person (vv. 26–27), and the once-for-all character of His sacrifice (v. 27). How does the divine oath of Psalm 110:4 (cited in v. 21) function as the guarantee of Christ’s Melchizedekian priesthood? What is the pastoral conclusion of verse 25 (‘He is able to save forever’), and how does the ground of that conclusion (‘since He always lives to make intercession’) connect the saving to the interceding?
- 3.** Read Hebrews 10:1–18. What two qualities of the Levitical sacrificial system does the author identify as evidence of their inadequacy (vv. 1–4)? How does the citation of Psalm 40:6–8 in verses 5–7 establish that the Levitical sacrifices were always insufficient by divine design? What is the significance of the contrast between the standing priest (v. 11) and the seated Christ (v. 12)? What does the citation of Jeremiah 31:33–34 in verses 16–17 (‘Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more’) establish about the permanent efficacy of the once-for-all sacrifice?
- 4.** Read Romans 3:21–26 carefully. Identify the specific christological vocabulary: justification (v. 24), redemption (v. 24), and propitiation (v. 25). What does verse 26 (‘that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus’) reveal about the problem that the priestly sacrifice had to solve? How does the propitiation satisfy both the divine justice (He is just) and the provision of the free offer of salvation (the justifier)? Why was it necessary for God to ‘display publicly’ Christ as a propitiation?
- 5.** Read 1 John 2:1–2 and Romans 8:33–34. In 1 John 2:1, what is the specific pastoral context in which John introduces the Advocate, what situation is he addressing? What qualification does John give the Advocate (‘Jesus Christ the righteous’), and why is this qualification pastorally significant? In Romans 8:33–34, what is the fourfold description of Christ that Paul provides, and how does each element contribute to the comprehensive picture of Christ’s priestly ministry?

INTERPRETATION QUESTIONS (WHAT DOES IT MEAN?)

- 6.** The lesson identifies three built-in limitations of the Aaronic priesthood (the sinfulness of the priests, their mortality, and the inability of animal blood to take away sins) and argues that these limitations are not defects but pedagogical features pointing beyond themselves to Christ. What specifically does each limitation teach about what the perfect Priest and perfect sacrifice must be? How does each limitation find its resolution in a specific characteristic of Christ’s priesthood?
- 7.** The lesson argues that the fact that Christ is simultaneously the offerer and the offering is the theological key to the infinite sufficiency of the atonement. How does the self-offering of an infinitely worthy Person differ from the offering of a finite animal sacrifice in terms of its value and its efficacy?

What would be lost soteriologically if Christ were merely the offerer (a sinless human priest offering an animal sacrifice) or merely the offering (an animal offered by a sinful Aaronic priest)?

8. The lesson presents propitiation as the first and most fundamental of the four benefits of the priestly sacrifice, arguing that the divine wrath against sin is not a primitive anthropomorphism but the holy God's necessary, personal, righteous response to sin. How does Romans 3:26 ('that He would be just and the justifier') illuminate why propitiation was necessary? What would be theologically wrong with a gospel that offered forgiveness without propitiation, that declared sins forgiven without the divine wrath having been satisfied?

9. The lesson presents the sitting of Christ (Hebrews 10:12) as the posture of completed work, contrasted with the standing of the Levitical priest (Hebrews 10:11) as the posture of perpetually unfinished work. How does the contrast between standing and sitting function as a visual theological argument in Hebrews? What does the sitting of Christ at the right hand of the Father (rather than standing at an altar) communicate about the character of His priestly work? How does the sitting connect to the 'It is finished' (tetelestai) of John 19:30?

10. The lesson describes the continuing intercession of Christ (Hebrews 7:25; Romans 8:34; 1 John 2:1) as the priestly work in its post-resurrection, post-ascension, permanently efficacious form. What is the specific nature of Christ's intercession, what does He actually do at the right hand of the Father? How does the intercession differ from the atoning sacrifice in its nature and its timing? And how does the permanence of the intercession ('He always lives') guarantee the permanence of the salvation ('He is able to save forever')?

APPLICATION QUESTIONS (WHAT DOES IT DEMAND OF US?)

11. The lesson describes the Lord's Supper as a memorial of the once-for-all sacrifice, a proclamation of the Lord's death until He comes, and a participation in the benefits of the completed priestly work. How does your congregation currently approach the Lord's Supper, with what affective register (primarily solemn, primarily joyful, or both), with what theological preparation, and with what level of awareness of the specific priestly realities being commemorated? What specific changes in the way you lead the congregation in the Lord's Supper would most effectively deepen their engagement with the priestly theology the supper proclaims?

12. The lesson recommends using 1 John 2:1 pastorally with believers who struggle with the guilt of post-conversion sin. Think of a specific person in your congregation (without naming them) who is weighed down by guilt for a sin committed after their new birth. How would you bring 1 John 2:1 to bear on their specific situation? What would you say about the Advocate, about His righteousness as the ground of His advocacy, and about the sufficiency of His completed atonement for sins committed after the new birth? What specific difference between the pastoral care grounded in 1 John 2:1 and pastoral care grounded only in general divine benevolence would you want to communicate?

13. The lesson addresses the Roman Catholic doctrine of the Mass as a re-offering or re-presentation of Christ's sacrifice, arguing that the ephapax character of the sacrifice in Hebrews makes this doctrine theologically untenable. How would you engage a sincere Roman Catholic who holds this doctrine with both theological clarity and pastoral charity? What specific biblical texts and arguments would you use? What aspects of the Roman Catholic understanding of the Mass do you think arise from genuine reverence for the priestly work of Christ, and what specifically is the theological error that the biblical case for the once-for-all character of the sacrifice corrects?

14. This lesson completes the second detailed treatment in Unit 6 of the Threefold Office. Looking ahead to Lesson 19 (Christ as King), and reflecting on the three offices together as the munus triplex, Prophet, Priest, and King, how does the priestly office serve as the theological center that the prophetic and kingly offices serve? Specifically: how does the prophetic word illuminate the meaning of the priestly sacrifice? And how does the kingly power apply and protect the benefits of the priestly atonement? What would be missing from the kingly office if the priestly sacrifice had not first secured access to God?

PRAYER FOCUS

Open this lesson's prayer time with a reading of Hebrews 10:19–25, the most theologically concentrated pastoral application of the priestly Christology in all of Hebrews, in which the author draws the comprehensive practical conclusion from everything he has established about Christ's priestly work in chapters 7–10. Read verses 19–22 slowly, attending to the specific grounds of the confidence they describe: "Since therefore, brethren, we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water." Let the four grounds of confidence be explicit in the group's awareness: the blood of Jesus (the completed atonement), the new and living way (the access inaugurated through Christ's death), the great Priest over the house of God (the continuing priestly ministry), and the hearts sprinkled clean (the experiential reality of expiation applied by the Spirit).

Spend time in worship that moves through the four benefits of the priestly sacrifice. Begin with propitiation: adore the Father for the love that designed the propitiation ("God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son") and adore the Son for the obedience that provided it ("He loved me and gave Himself up for me"). Then move to expiation: receive, with gratitude and relief, the cleansing of the conscience from dead works and the declaration that the blood of Jesus cleanses from all sin. Then move to reconciliation: adore the God who did not wait for sinners to approach Him but who came to them in the flesh, dying to remove the enmity and restore the fellowship. Then move to

redemption: celebrate the purchase price that was infinite enough to buy freedom for every captive the Father gave the Son, from every tribe, tongue, people, and nation.

Pray specifically and personally through the continuing intercession. Name before the Father the specific people in your congregation for whom Christ is at this moment making intercession: the struggling, the doubtful, the sinning, the grieving, the tempted, and the dying. Then receive, with a faith proportional to the promise of Hebrews 7:25, the assurance that He is able to save forever those who draw near through Him, because He always lives. The intercession does not depend on the quality of the believer's current spiritual performance; it depends on the quality of the Intercessor's indestructible life.

Close with the invitation of Hebrews 4:16, spoken together as the corporate response of a community that has understood what the priestly office means and who is willing to act on it:

"Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."

HEBREWS 4:16, NASB 1995

Soli Deo Gloria
To God Alone Be the Glory

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

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