

Hebrews 10:1-4 | For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near. ² Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sins? ³ But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. ⁴ For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

Hebrews 10:8-14 | When he said above, “You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings” (these are offered according to the law), ⁹ then he added, “Behold, I have come to do your will.” He does away with the first in order to establish the second.

¹⁰ And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

¹¹ And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. ¹² But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, ¹³ waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet.

¹⁴ For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.

Christ our Priest | Advent 2025

We’re spending this Advent looking at Christ in the Westminster Shorter Catechism. Last week we established that Christ is our Redeemer. For the remaining three weeks of Advent we’re looking at the offices which Christ performs as our Redeemer. Christ as our Redeemer executes the offices of a prophet, of a priest, and of a king. Last week we looked at how Christ is our true Prophet, he himself proclaims the truth. This week we look at Christ our Priest.

Why do you need a priest? What is a priest? Why does every culture and religion throughout the world seem to have them? Because they provide two things; sacrifice and intercession.

WSC Q 25: How does Christ execute the office of a priest?

A: Christ executeth the office of a priest, in his once offering up of himself a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice, and reconcile us to God, and in making continual intercession for us.

1. Sacrifice

Now why do we need someone to offer gifts and sacrifices on our behalf? Why would we even want to do that? Well sometimes its helpful to grasp the positive nature of something by looking at its negative. After the Exodus from Egypt God gathered his people together at Sinai. He established a covenant with his people. Then Moses went up the mountain and received from the Lord the pattern of their worship and the tabernacle. But he took too long.

The people complain of Moses’ absence and they request that Aaron make for them gods to worship. They pool together their resources, each offering some of the gold they had plundered from the Egyptians and Aaron fashions for them a golden calf. Aaron declared the golden calf to be “the gods that brought you up out of Egypt,”

Exodus 32:6 | And they rose up early the next day and offered burnt offerings and brought peace offerings. And the people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play.

What was that? We know it was wrong. It was at least a blatant breaking of the first three commandments. But it might not have crossed your mind to do something like that. Why not start to farm the land, or steal each others cattle? Why not head back to Egypt? I think we'd expect one of these first. Why the inclination to design their own form of worship? Why pool their resources and then offer up sacrifices? So what happened, *civilization* is what happened.

Sacrifice is the nature of any preservation of being. If you want to protect your land from invaders you must sacrifice your sons in war. That is if we are to be bound together as a people over time we all must sacrifice to something above us. Without something above us that we all sacrifice to we will turn and devour one another. Yes but our secular age requires no priests, you say. Well we have them anyway. They are the ones who mediate between us and those powers we know are above us.

We have a god above us in the United States. It is from this god we receive all of our provision. Her name is Economy. And we have a priest, his name is Jerome Powell, and he works in a temple filled with gold, called the Federal Reserve. Sometimes economy is happy and blessings are bestowed, interest rates are lower. Sometimes economy is mad and we must all offer up a little more so that she might see our sacrifice and honor us later. I'm not saying this is bad, I'm just saying this is how the world works, priests are inevitable. You must have a priest to sacrifice to the god above you.

2. Intercession

Exodus 32:7 | And the Lord said to Moses, "Go down, for your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves.

Sacrifice is an offering up but this second part of the priest's duty is about receiving down from above. The priest offers up but intercedes for us so that we might receive down those blessings we need. They advocate for our needs before the one who is above. The purpose of the sacrifice of war is to advocate surrender and therefore receive peace. When we have been corrupted the priest intercedes on our behalf to stay the wrath of God and to promote our blessing.

When the Israelites rebelled against God by fashioning their own god, God's wrath was kindled against them to the point of seeking their destruction. Now that we understand the shape of their sin we can see that this makes perfect sense. He is the God that made them a people by the sacrifice of the Egyptians. But they made themselves not his people by denying him as their God in sacrificing to an idol. God says to Moses,

Exodus 32:9-10 | And the Lord said to Moses, “I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stiff-necked people. ¹⁰ Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them, in order that I may make a great nation of you.”

Here is the point that I’m slowly arriving at, there is a real God above. One who demands real obedience. He is the one to whom we offer up the whole of our lives in obedience to him and he is the one from whom all blessings flow. When we deny him our end is of course absolute destruction. But Moses acts as his people’s intercessor.

Exodus 32:30 | The next day Moses said to the people, “You have sinned a great sin. And now I will go up to the Lord; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin.”

Moses goes up before the Lord as a representative of the people, recognizing plainly their sin against God and heads up the mountain to seek to bring atonement for their sin. This is a broad word but you can hear its meaning of reconciliation. At one ment. To re unite and make a relationship once again. So God and his people might no longer be divided. The priest intercedes. Moses pleads for God to forgive his people of their sin. And if he will not forgive them of their sin then to sacrifice himself. But God does not receive Moses’ sacrifice, in fact Moses himself will rebel against the Lord and not enter the promised land.

2. Christ’s Sacrifice and Intercession

The Lord sets up a system of worship for his people. Priests offer up sacrifices on behalf of the people to God. They are to offer the fruits of their labor: livestock, grain, oil. The blood of these animals is poured out on their behalf to the Lord. The blood of bulls and goats die instead of the people. They see the cost of their sin and its payment.

Now, to our minds this seems strange and archaic but what I’ve wanted to show in this more fundamental examination of the sacrifice and intercession is that it’s actually quite ordinary. It is more glorious than any of the other nations in its particulars. But the nation of Israel is surrounded by other nations that offer sacrifices in a like manner to other gods. But the nation of Israel was not the people of some local deity. In this accommodation of worship given by God, there is a condescension of God to the level of his people.

But the sacrifices are obviously insufficient. What is the state of this people before their God? They’re hearts are corrupted against him. They live in sinful rebellion. No one seeks for God or honors him as God. Sure they perform the ritual but their hearts are far away. It is one thing to sacrifice to make a nation. It is one thing to sacrifice for some better future, or to have rain, or have a family name. But what about when what you deserve from the God above you is death? What if the God above you, is the true God who gave you life, and requires of you obedience?

Psalm 49:7-9 | Truly no man can ransom another, or give to God the price of his life, ⁸ for the ransom of their life is costly and can never suffice, ⁹ that he should live on forever and never see the pit.

It is intuitive that you need a prophet, because you need to know the truth. It is intuitive that you need a king, because your enemies must be conquered. But what happens when the revelation of the truth by the prophet reveals that you are at enmity with God? How can you ransom your life? Bulls and goats? The writer of Hebrews recognizes this. He sees that this law of ritual sacrifices established by God for his people, could not have been the thing itself that brought reconciliation between man and God. It is but a shadow. If the sacrifice was truly effective, it would satisfy the wrath of God, it would not need to be repeated every year.

Hebrews 10:3-4 | But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. ⁴ For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

Of course it is impossible. How can a man ransom his life from God? What can a man pay or offer? Who has given a gift to God that he might be repaid? What can we give to God that is not already his? How can we atone for our sins before the one who made us and gave us all things? Could we fight a war with God to establish peace? Could we sacrifice the whole of our lives unto death, but it would only be receiving our just deserts! What kind of priest could possibly intercede and what could he possibly offer?

Hebrews 10:11-14 | And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. ¹² But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, ¹³ waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. ¹⁴ For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.

Christ has done it. Christ is that high priest. What must be offered for the redemption of mankind before the living God. Only one who is perfect in obedience, spotless in his offering. Separated from man and having none of the stain of man. Who can pick his life back up again. But only one who is a man, who can die as a man and on behalf of mankind. A high priest who can offer up himself in the place of the people and yet live to intercede for them. Only if God became a man and give his life for the sins of the world.

Hebrews 7:23-25 | The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office, ²⁴ but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. ⁵

This priest is able to save to the uttermost. Because although he died, he yet lives. He died in your place and now you have peace with God. Come to him the one who paid for your sins and receive from him the gift of his righteousness. Sacrifice and intercession.