

Titles of Christians (11)
Priests
Revelation 1:5 – 6
Sermon by Pastor Sylvia Chan

Today we are going to study another title of Christians. Last time we saw that Christians are compared to the living stones that build up the spiritual temple of God. Today we are going to study Christians as priests in the spiritual temple of God.

^{NASB} **Revelation 1:5 – 6** ... and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood – ⁶ and He has made us *to be* a kingdom, priests to His God and Father – to Him *be* the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

The book of Revelation is a message revealed to Apostle John. This particular passage, Revelation 1:5-6, is a greeting from the Lord Jesus Christ and Apostle John. It says here that the Lord Jesus loves us; his blood which was shed on the cross washes us clean from all sins. As a result we are free from both the guilt of sin and the power of sin. (Please refer to the book “Becoming a New Person” by Pastor Eric Chang on the guilt of sin and the power of sin; I will not repeat the whole explanation here.) Then the Lord Jesus made us to be a kingdom, and priests to serve his God and Father. According to the word of the Lord Jesus in this passage, Christians are the priests of Yahweh God.

Priesthood in the Old Testament

Let us now look at priesthood in the Bible. Priests had a very important role in the life of Israel because only the priests could come before the altar to offer sacrifices

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directly to Yahweh God. When the Israelites wanted to offer sacrifice to God, they had to hand the sacrifices over to the priests, then the priests would offer up the sacrifices on their behalf.

Even the king was not allowed to come before the altar to inquire directly of the will of God. When the king had to make important decisions concerning the nation, he would have to ask the High Priest to help, then the High Priest would use two objects called “Urim” (אֲזִיזִים) and “Thummim” (תְּמִימִים) to ask Yahweh God for guidance in order to make the decision.

Since priests and high priests carry such important responsibilities, who then can become priests and high priests?

It is written in the Law that only the descendants of Aaron, the brother of Moses, can serve as priests before the altar of Yahweh God.

^{NASB} **Exodus 29:44** “I will consecrate the tent of meeting and the altar; I will also consecrate Aaron and his sons to minister as priests to Me.” (Exo 29:44 NASB)

The word “I” refers to Yahweh God; this is a direct command from God to the Israelites. Here Yahweh God says He has chosen Aaron the brother of Moses, and his descendants to serve as priests.

Then what about the high priest? According to Hebrew-English dictionaries, Aaron and his eldest descendants served as high priests, the rest of his descendants served as priests.

The Tabernacle (tent of meeting) in the Old Testament

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Where did the high priest offer the sacrifice? And what did he do?

^{NASB} **Hebrews 9:2 – 3** For there was a tabernacle prepared, the outer one, in which *were* the lampstand and the table and the sacred bread; this is called the holy place.
³ Behind the second veil there was a tabernacle which is called the Holy of holies (Heb 9:2-3 NASB)

There are a lot of things compacted in this passage, so we need to break it down and study it carefully. The word “tabernacle” comes from the Hebrew word “מִשְׁכָּן” (*mishkan*); it simply means the tent of meeting. In a tabernacle (the tent of meeting) there were:

- The first part is called “the holy place” where there were the lampstand, the table and the consecrated bread. The priests would go into this holy place every day to offer daily sacrifice to God.
- There is a second veil, behind which is a second part of the tabernacle called the Holy of holies. In the Holy of holies there were the golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant.

^{NASB} **Leviticus 16:3** Aaron shall enter the holy place with this: with a bull for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering. (Lev 16:3 NASB)

Aaron was the High Priest at that time. Every day Aaron the High Priest would bring into the holy place a bull for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering.

But into the Holy of holies even the high priest could enter only once a year:

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^{NASB} **Hebrews 9:6 – 7** Now when these things have been so prepared, the priests are continually entering the outer tabernacle performing the divine worship,⁷ but into the second, only the high priest *enters* once a year, not without *taking* blood, which he offers for himself and for the sins of the people committed in ignorance. (Heb 9:6 – 7 NASB)

Here the term “the outer Tabernacle” means the first part of the Tabernacle, which is the holy place. The priests entered the holy place every day to offer sacrifice; but into the second part, the Holy of holies, only the high priest could enter, and that only once a year, and “not without taking blood”. That means he had to bring a sacrificial animal to atone for his own sins and for the sins of the people which they had committed in ignorance.

Priests and High Priest in the New Testament

We have looked briefly at the priesthood and the Old Testament tabernacle, now we come to the New Testament.

Revelation 1:6 says “and He has made us *to be* a kingdom, priests to His God and Father”. The word “us” refers to the recipients of this message, the Christians; therefore according to this verse, Revelation 1:6, all true Christians are priests of God. But then who is the High Priest?

^{NASB} **Hebrews 4:14** Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. (Heb 4:14 NASB)

Our Lord Jesus the Son of God is the high priest. After the Lord was resurrected, he spent forty days with his disciples to teach them about the Kingdom of God, then

he was taken up to heaven; and according to the Scripture, he has passed through the heavens, and is now sitting at the right hand of Yahweh God.

^{RSV} **Mark 16:19** So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God. (Mar 16:19 RSV)

All true Christians can enter into the Holy of holies

In the Old Testament time, even the priests were not allowed to come into the Holy of holies, only the High Priest was allowed; but in the New Testament every true Christian can come into the Holy of holies! Why?

^{NASB} **Matthew 27:50 – 51** And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit. ⁵¹ And behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth shook and the rocks were split. (Mat 27:50 – 51 NASB)

This passage says that when the Lord yielded his spirit, he died, and the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. This is very significant!

Do you know which veil that was? Was it the veil at the entrance of the temple? Or was it the veil that separated the Holy of holies from the holy place?

The original Greek word for the word “veil” is “καταπέτασμα” (*katapetasma*). According to Greek-English dictionaries, this word *katapetasma* refers to the veil that separated the Holy of holies from the holy place, not the veil at the entrance of the temple.

At the death of the Lord Jesus, the veil that separated the Holy of holies from the holy place was torn in two. That was very important! Why?

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In Old Testament times, only the high priest could go into the Holy of holies, and that only once a year. But at the death of the Lord Jesus, the veil that separated the Holy of holies from the holy place was torn in two, there was no more separation between the two! Christians are the priests of the spiritual temple of God, that means Christians can go right into the Holy of holies!

^{NIV} **Hebrews 10:19 – 22** Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰ by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, ²¹ and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²² let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. (Heb 10:19-22 NIV)

Here it says that the death of the Lord Jesus has destroyed the curtain that separated the holy place and the Most Holy Place (that is the Holy of holies). Before that, only the High Priest could go into the Holy of holies, but now the priests can also go into the Holy of holies which is where the ark of the covenant, the presence of Yahweh God, is! Please remember that Christians are the priests of the spiritual Temple of God!

In Old Testament times, when the High Priest entered the Holy of holies, he had to carry the blood of the sacrificial animal. Now Christians can enter the Holy of holies by the blood of the Lord Jesus!

^{NASB} **Hebrews 4:16** Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. (Heb 4:16 NASB)

Here it says that not only can we come before the throne of grace of Yahweh God, we can also receive mercy and grace to help us when we are in need!

Also when we repent of our sinful life and are baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus, we will receive the Holy Spirit into our hearts. It is the Holy Spirit who will teach us and guide us every moment, so we don't rely on the "Urim" and "Thummim" any more!

What should we do? What are our responsibilities?

The Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed in AD 70, almost two thousand years ago. In New Testament times, the church is the spiritual Temple of God (please refer to my previous sermon "Living Stones"). Christians are the priests serving in the spiritual Temple of God; we as priests ought to offer spiritual sacrifices to God. What are our spiritual sacrifices?

1. We offer our bodies as a living sacrifice

^{NASB} **Romans 12:1** Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is* your spiritual service of worship. (Rom 12:1 NASB)

First we ought to present our bodies as a living and holy sacrifice to God. But how are we going to offer our bodies as a living and holy sacrifice to God? We are not going to put ourselves on a stove to be burned as a living sacrifice, are we? What then are we going to do? Let's read the next verse, Romans 12:2.

^{NASB} **Romans 12:2** And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. (Rom 12:2 NASB)

It tells us not be conformed to the world. It means that we do not follow what the world is doing, we do not pursue what the world is pursuing, but we let our minds be changed by the word of God. When we put the word of God into practice, gradually our minds will be changed by the word of God, and our will would become more and more like the will of God.

In other words, first we start with obeying the written word of God in the Bible, and God will gradually reveal His will directly to us. As we continue to obey the will of God in the Bible as well as what is revealed to us directly, eventually our will would be conformed to His will, so His will is our will!

2. We offer up praise to God

The first point was that we offer up our bodies as a living sacrifice, and the second point is that we offer up praise to God.

^{NASB} **Hebrews 13:15** Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name. (Heb 13:15 NASB)

This passage says we can offer our thanks to Yahweh God, for that is a sacrifice of praise to Him. It is very important to give praise to God; when we give Him praise, we acknowledge that He is the One who created all things and He controls all things in the universe.

When other Christians hear our praise to God, they would be encouraged greatly, especially those whose faith is weak. Our praise to God will help them to recall what God has done for them, and hopefully that will help them to renew their faith in God.

Indeed, when we give praise to Yahweh God, we ourselves will benefit the most, because when we give praise to God, our hearts will be full of joy, and our faith will grow stronger. So our second spiritual sacrifice is giving praise to God.

3. Doing good deeds and sharing with others

^{NIV} **Hebrews 13:16** And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased. (Heb 13:16 NIV)

Our third spiritual sacrifice is to do good deeds and to share with others; it says here that God is pleased with such sacrifice. Please take notice here, we do not earn salvation by our good deeds, but it is that after we are saved and become children of God, we do good deeds to please our Father in heaven who has given us so much love and care; therefore we share this love and care with others just as God has cared for us.

^{NIV} **2 Corinthians 1:3 – 4** Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, ⁴ who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. (2Co 1:3–4 NIV)

This is one of the verses I really love. When we are in trouble, Yahweh God helps us and comforts us. But we don't simply keep God's love to ourselves solely for us to enjoy! No! God helps us so that we may in turn help others; God loves us so that we may in turn give love to others! (Please read my testimony "Goodness and Loving Kindness Will Follow Me All the Days of My Life" at www.christiandc.org)

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^{RSV} **Galatians 6:10** So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of faith. (Gal 6:10 RSV)

Here it says that we should do good to all men, especially those in the household of faith, which means Christians! We should do good to all men, especially do good to fellow Christians. That is our spiritual sacrifice to Yahweh God!

Conclusion

Now let's sum up everything we have discussed. All Christians are priests of Yahweh God. By the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ, we can come into the Holy of holies right before the throne of God to offer sacrifice to Him. This grace is so great that is beyond what the Israelites in the Old Testament could imagine. Therefore we should thank Yahweh God and the Lord Jesus Christ with our spiritual offerings:

- We offer our bodies as a living sacrifice.
- We offer up praise to God.
- We do good deeds and share with others.