

## Every Believer Is Equally Important in the Church

God has established three major institutions on this Earth: the family, civil government, and the local church. It is the local church that has been commissioned by God to carry out His purposes in reaching the lost to find salvation in Christ. Therefore, God's plan for a Christian always will be fulfilled best when connected with the local church.

The church, created by Christ, belongs to Him. We first learn of the church in Matthew 16: **17. And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father Who is in Heaven. 18. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this Rock I will build My church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it."** (Matthew 16:17-18 [RSV])

It is only through being a member of the church that one is saved, because the church *is* the body of Christ, comprised *of* the saved multitudes from every nation on Earth. The Apostle Paul wrote in Ephesians 1:22-23 [RSV], **22. and He has put all things under His feet and has made Him the Head over all things for the church, 23. which is His Body, the fullness of Him Who fills all in all.** If a person rejects the Lord's church, then he is rejecting Christ, and he shall remain eternally lost, for Jesus said in John 14:6 [RSV], **"I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by Me."** Therefore, it is incumbent upon every believer that is a part of the Lord's Body, His church, to understand that everyone has an equally important function to perform in the working of the church.

A local church is a body of men and women who have been saved and called by God to serve in a specific area. In 1 Corinthians 12:27, Paul, writing to saved people, states clearly, **"you are the body of Christ."**

**14. For the body does not consist of one member but of many. 15. If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. 16. And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. 17. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? 18. But as it is, God arranged the organs in the body, each one of them, as he chose. 19. If all were a single organ, where would the body be? 20. As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. 21. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." 22. On the contrary, the parts of the body which seem to be weaker are indispensable, 23. and those parts of the body which we think less honorable we invest with the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, 24. which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so**

***composed the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior part, 25. that there may be no discord in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. 26. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. 27. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.*** (1 Corinthians 12:14-27 [RSV])

In the above passage, the Apostle Paul compares the church body to the human body. In verses 14-20, Paul stresses how each member has a different function. No one member can function alone, (verse 21). So, therefore, each member's contribution is equally important (verses 22-24). We are not saying that there are no offices in the Lord's church, because there are, such as elders, deacons, teachers, and evangelists and preachers. But every member of the Lord's church has something to contribute to it. Members may be different and have varying roles to fulfill, but each member is equally important. That is what Paul was telling the church at Corinth, and a properly functioning body operates as a single unit, (verses 25-27).

One of the striking points made in the *Book of Hebrews* to prove the equally important function of each member of the Lord's church is that all members are called priests. There is no division of laity and clergy as one finds within many denominations. In the church of the New Testament, no such distinction is made.

The first mention of a "Priesthood" in God's word is found in Exodus 19:6. At the time that God gave the law to the nation of Israel He addressed them as follows: ***5. Now therefore, if you will obey My voice and keep My covenant, you shall be My own possession among all peoples; for all the Earth is Mine, 6. and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.*** (Exodus 19:5-6 [RSV])

Since this honor was dependent on an "if", for God said *if* you will obey My voice and keep My covenant, it never materialized. Israel did not obey His voice nor keep His laws, and therefore they did not become a national priesthood. Instead, God chose one family – the family of Aaron – and he and his sons were ordained to officiate as a special priesthood, as we read in Exodus 28:1 [RSV]: ***"Then bring near to you Aaron your brother, and his sons with him, from among the people of Israel, to serve Me as priests. . . ."*** The New Testament tells us in Hebrews 7:11 that this was known as the ***"Levitical"*** priesthood because Aaron and his sons were of the tribe of Levi. It is often called the Aaronic priesthood because Aaron was its first High Priest (Hebrews 5:4). This priesthood functioned during the Old Testament days and was still in force when our Lord came from Heaven to be our Savior.

But upon the death of Jesus a change was made, as we read in Hebrews 7:11-12. Another priest arose, and one after a new order, which actually was an older order – the order of Melchizedek. Five times in the *Epistle to the Hebrews* we

read of Christ as the High Priest *after the order of Melchizedek*. The old priesthood was abolished; a new one took its place. Aaron was the original head of the old Levitical priesthood; Christ is the Head of the new spiritual priesthood. This was dramatically illustrated when our Lord stood before Caiaphas, as recorded in Matthew 26:63-65. Two High Priests faced each other on that occasion; one, the earthly Levitical priest; the other, Heaven's Great High Priest, the Lord Jesus Christ. Caiaphas rent his clothes and by Jewish law, he was forbidden to do so: ***“The priest who is chief among his brethren, upon whose head the anointing oil is poured, and who has been consecrated to wear the garments, shall not let the hair of his head hang loose, nor rend his clothes;”*** (Leviticus 21:10 [RSV]).

Not only had Caiaphas forfeited his job, but by his engaging in subterfuge and conspiracy (Matthew 26:4) in knowingly declaring guilty an innocent Man, Jesus Christ, and demanding He be killed, under the Law of Moses *Caiaphas was subject to the death penalty himself*. ***“If a malicious witness rises against any man to accuse him of wrongdoing . . . if the witness is a false witness and has accused his brother falsely, then you shall do to him as he had meant to do to his brother; so you shall purge the evil from the midst of you.”*** (Deuteronomy 19:16; 18-19 [RSV]) Rightly so did Caiaphas forfeit his position, for, though he did not realize it at the time, the new High Priest of the better covenant was standing before Him and was about to succeed and supersede him. Aaron, as were all subsequent high priests that followed after under the Law of Moses, was a human being, full of failure. Christ, our High Priest, on the other hand, is ***“ . . . holy, blameless, unstained, separated from sinners, exalted above the heavens”*** (Hebrews 7:26 [RSV]). As the writer of the *Book of Hebrews* continues, ***“He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people; He did this once for all when He offered up Himself”*** (Hebrews 7:27 [RSV]).

So what is the difference between the Aaronic and Christ's priesthood? Let us take a few moments to look and see!

Aaron and his sons were the priests of old. Christ and His brothers and sisters who are the children of God (believers) are the priesthood of today. The Lord Jesus is called the "High Priest" twelve times in the *Epistle to the Hebrews* and "Priest" about six times more. As we read for example in Hebrews 4:14 [RSV]: ***“Since then we have a Great High Priest Who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.”***

Aaron was a human being, full of failure. Christ, our High Priest, is ***“ . . . holy, blameless, unstained, separated from sinners, exalted above the heavens”*** (Hebrews 7:26 [RSV]).

Aaron's priesthood was an earthly one and operated in connection with an earthly sanctuary (Hebrews 9:1). Christ's priesthood is a heavenly one, as we

read in Hebrews 8:1-2 [RSV]: **1. Now the point in what we are saying is this: we have such a High Priest, One Who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in Heaven, 2. a Minister in the sanctuary and the true tent which is set up not by man but by the Lord.**

Aaron and his sons offered physical, animal sacrifices, which could never take away sins (Hebrews 10:11). Christ, on the other hand, offered Himself through the eternal Spirit without spot to God: “. . . **how much more shall the blood of Christ, Who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, purify your conscience from dead works to serve the living God**” (Hebrews 9:14 [RSV]). The blood of animals could never atone for sin, but the precious blood of Christ indeed purges the conscience from dead works to serve the living God.

Aaron and his sons did what all men do eventually – **they died**. Hebrews 7:23-24 [RSV] says, **23. 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.** Our Savior and Great High Priest continues forever; He has an unchangeable priesthood, and so **“Consequently He is able for all time to save those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them”** (Hebrews 7:25 [RSV]).

Aaron had to offer sacrifices not only for the sins of the people, but also for his own sins (Hebrews 5:3). But Christ died for **our** sins; He did not offer for His own sins because, praise God, because He had none. Aaron offered the blood of others (of animals) for his own sins; Christ, on the other hand, offered His own blood for the sins of others, which is the exact reverse.

Aaron's work never put away one sin. Christ's blood is able to cleanse every soul from sin. As John tells us in 1 John 1:9 [RSV], **“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”**

What does this expression **“priest after the order of Melchizedek”** mean? The seventh chapter of the *Epistle to the Hebrews* fully explains it. Time does not permit us to quote that chapter in full, but let us briefly consider the gist of its teaching:

There was a priest named Melchizedek who lived in Abraham's day, more than 400 years before the Law of Moses was given. Actually, we really do not know for sure what this man's name was, because Melchizedek is not a name so much as it is a title. It comes from two Hebrew words, "malchi," meaning "My King," and "tzedeq," meaning "is righteousness." Hence, he is called **“King of Righteousness”** in Hebrews 7:2. Melchizedek was not only a priest but also a king – the King of Salem. Salem means "peace." When Abraham was tested in

offering up his son Isaac as a sacrifice to God, Abraham called the place **Yireh** (pronounced raw-aw), meaning "The Lord Will Provide," and tradition says this is the same place where the Temple was built centuries later. (It is also where the Muslims claim Mohammed ascended to Heaven, and it is covered now by the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem.) **Yireh** (pronounced raw-aw) of Abraham and **Salem** of Melchizedek became **Yerusalem** in honor of these two great men, and Yerusalem is better known now as **Jerusalem**. Just a side note I thought was interesting.

This man grew up in the Lord to become a righteous King of Salem. He was therefore King of Righteousness before he was King of Peace. In this he is a beautiful type of Christ, Who is truly the Righteous One by the fact of Who He is. He became the King of Peace through His redemptive work completed upon the cross, because He is our Peace and He made peace through the blood of His cross, as the Apostle Paul tells us in Colossians 1:20.

The fact that Melchizedek lived long before the Levitical priesthood came into being suggests that this higher priesthood of Melchizedek was in God's mind long before the Jewish priesthood commenced. Since Melchizedek typifies Christ and His work, it proves that Jesus' Heavenly priesthood in God's purposes preceded the Jewish priesthood.

Since Melchizedek's parents nor his descendants are mentioned as being priests in Genesis, the Spirit of God in the *Epistle to the Hebrews* uses this to teach that therefore Christ, Whom Melchizedek represents as High Priest, had no parents nor descendant. His priesthood was not received through hereditary means, as was the Aaronic priesthood. He was a priest because he was a righteous man. Jesus is the first High Priest after the order of Melchizedek and the last one too, for no one ever was High Priest after this order *before* Christ and no one will ever come *after* Him, for the sublime reason that He lives forever. He is our High Priest, as Hebrews 7:25 says, because He "**always lives.**"

The first thing Christ did as High Priest after this new order was established was to "**offer Himself to God for our sins,**" something Aaron never did nor could do. All the sacrifices which Aaron and his sons offered through the centuries pointed on to the one and all-availing sacrifice of Christ upon the cross. Christ's priesthood thus sets aside the old order. The only priesthood the Bible now knows about is that of Christ as High Priest, and of all believers as priests, as we go on now to consider.

The Apostle Peter writes, **4. Come to Him, to that Living Stone, rejected by men but in God's sight chosen and precious; 5. and like living stones be yourselves built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. 6. For it stands in Scripture: "Behold, I am laying in Zion a Stone, a Cornerstone chosen and precious, and he who believes in Him will not be put to**

**shame." 7. To you therefore who believe, He is precious, but for those who do not believe, "The very Stone which the builders rejected has become the Head of the corner," 8. and "A Stone that will make men stumble, a Rock that will make them fall"; for they stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do. 9. But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of Him Who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. (1 Peter 2:4-9 [RSV])**

Aaron was the first high priest and his sons were priests under him. So now Christ is the one and only Heavenly High Priest and His brothers and sisters, God's children – the saved believers in Jesus – form the present spiritual priesthood, as the above cited texts state. We are both a holy and a royal priesthood. And that means all of us who wear the name of Jesus.

The true Priesthood has Christ as its Great High Priest and Head, as we have already seen, and His headquarters are in Heaven. No man on Earth has the right to claim that he is the head of the Lord's church. Any individual who claims that authority is doing so at his or her own peril, he or she is a false pretender, who without any Scriptural warrant is usurping a place which rightfully belongs to the Lord Jesus Christ alone. The representative of Christ down here is the Holy Spirit, who indwells every true believer in Jesus.

Yes, all believers are priests, including the sisters in Christ. Being a priest does not mean being a preacher, elder or deacon. Priests are worshippers and servants, and this is open to sisters as well as brethren, while public preaching or teaching is forbidden to women, who are not to usurp authority over the man (1 Timothy 2:12).

Priests in the Old Testament were such because they were born into Aaron's family; now we are priests because we are born into God's family. They were priests by natural birth; we are priests by spiritual birth – by being born again in the watery grave of baptism.

Since a believer is a priest by virtue of being born again at his new birth, it means that no gift is needed to act as a priest. Prophets in the Old Testament were chosen by God because of special gifts, as today evangelists, elders, deacons and teachers are specially gifted and ordained by the Lord for His service. But this is not so in relation to priesthood. A babe in Christ can pray, or worship, or give of his means; and those are the jobs belonging to everyone in the priesthood. We are holy priests. We are called to worship God by our praise and our sacrificial service. As Peter puts it: **"to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."** Worship is every priest's first and foremost occupation, and for that we are all on equal footing!