

146. Q. Are the provisions and benefits of Christ's death for all men, unconditionally?
147. Q. What, then, is the most fundamental fact of all time and eternity?
148. Q. What tragic implication is involved in the notion that the death of Jesus was only a martyrdom?
149. Q. What, then, is our Altar under the Christian Dispensation?
150. Q. What is our Sacrifice?
151. Q. Who is our High Priest under the Christian Dispensation?
152. Q. What is our Priesthood under the Christian Dispensation?
153. Q. Is there any authority in the New Testament for a special human priesthood under the Christian Dispensation?
154. Q. What is our privilege as priests unto God?

SPECIAL STUDY: ON THE WORD "RELIGION"

A few remarks are in order here about the etymology of the word, "religion."

Cicero (*De Natura Deorum*, 2, 28, 72) derives it from the Latin third-conjugation verb *relego*, *relegere*, meaning "to go over again," that is, in reading, in speech, or in thought, "to consider carefully," and hence, as used by him—Cicero—to mean "reverent observance" (of duties to the gods). Although this may have been the pagan notion of the word, certainly it is not the Biblical meaning of it.

According to Lactantius (*Divina Instituta*, 4, 28) and Augustine (*Retractiones*, 1, 13), "religion" derives from the first-conjugation Latin verb, *religo*, *religare*, meaning "to bind back," "to bind anew," etc. Harper's Latin Dictionary (Andrews' Freund, revised by Lewis and Short) has this

to say (s.v.): "Modern etymologists mostly agree with this latter view, assuming as root, **lig**, to bind, whence also **lic**-**tor**, **lex**, and **ligare**; hence, **religio** sometimes means the same as **obligatio**." The close relationship of the family of words formed around the root **lig** (ligament, ligature, oblige, etc.) to that formed around the root **leg** (**lex**, **legis**, "law," **legislate**, **legal**, etc.) is too obvious to be ignored. These two families of words both have the connotation of a binding force. Whatever the word "religion" may have meant to the pagan world, the fact remains that the essence of Biblical religion is a **binding of a person anew to God** (healing of the schism caused by sin: the God of the Bible is the covenant God), and is fully expressed in the word "reconciliation" (2 Cor. 5:17-21). As a consequence of this healing through regeneration and continuous sanctification, the righteous person ultimately attains **holiness** (from **holon**, "whole"), which is wholeness or perfection (that is, completeness, from **per plus facere**, "to make thorough, complete"). Matt. 5:48—"Ye therefore shall be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." The attainment of this perfection is consummated, of course, in the ultimate redemption of the body (Rom. 8:18-24, 8:11; 1 Cor. 15:35-58; 2 Cor. 5:1-10; Phil. 3:20-21, etc.).

SPECIAL STUDY: ON THE DISPENSATIONS

Also, it will be noted that in Lesson Twenty-Nine of this section, I have referred to the Patriarchal, Jewish, and Christian systems as three revealed "religions." Strictly speaking, however, according to the teaching of the Bible itself, these are three successive Dispensations of the one progressive revelation of true religion. The Dispensations changed — from the family to the national to the universal — as the type of priesthood changed. The Patriarchal Dispensation was the age of family rule and family worship, with the patriarch (paternal head) acting as prophet (re-

vealer of God's will), priest (intercessor) and king for his entire progeny. The Jewish Dispensation was ushered in with the establishment of a national institution of worship (the Tabernacle, and later the Temple) and a national priesthood (the Levitical or Aaronic priesthood). The Christian Dispensation had its beginning with the abrogation of the Old Covenant and the ratification of the New by one and the same event—the death of Christ on the Cross (although the Jewish Institution was permitted to remain as a social and civil institution some forty years longer, that is, down to the destruction of Jerusalem and the dispersion of its people by the Roman armies, A.D. 70). (Cf. Jn. 1:17, Gal. 3:23-29, 2 Cor. 3:1-11, Col. 2:13-15, and especially the seventh, eighth, ninth, and tenth chapters of the Epistle to the Hebrews.) Under the Christian System all Christians are priests unto God, and Christ is their High Priest (1 Pet. 2:5, 9; Rev. 5:10; Rom. 12:1-2, 8:34; Heb. 2:17, also chs. 3, 5, 7; 1 Tim. 2:5, 1 Jn. 2:1, etc.). It will be recalled that Alexander Campbell referred to the Patriarchal Dispensation as the starlight age, to the Jewish Dispensation as the moonlight age, to the special ministry of John the Baptizer (to the Jewish nation) as the twilight age, and to the present or Christian Dispensation (which may also rightly be designated the Dispensation of the Holy Spirit) as the sunlight age, of the unfolding of the divine Plan of Redemption. These successive "ages," therefore, embrace the successive stages in the revelation of true religion as set forth in the Bible. Refusal to recognize this fundamental unity of the Bible as a whole can result only in confusion, presumption, and ultimate rejection by the Author of the Bible Himself.

It will be noted also that Christ Himself is both Sacrifice and Priest in the present Dispensation. In the diagram following Lesson 39 herein, I have suggested that our universal Altar in this Dispensation was Calvary or the Cross. I am not unmindful of the fact that there are Bible scholars

who insist that our Lord's perfect human nature was itself the Altar upon which He, as the Lamb of God who "taketh away the sin of the world" (Jn. 1:29) offered up His divine nature as the perfect Sacrifice (Atonement or Covering) for human sin. I consider this point well taken. (Cf. Heb. 10:5, 2:14; 1 Pet. 2:24; Heb. 4:14-16; Luke 1:26-28, etc.) Does not Luke's language here mean that the Holy Spirit created the physical nature of Jesus in the womb of the virgin? That is to say, as the Spirit brooded over the primeval chaos "in the beginning," to initiate the physical or cosmic creation, so did the same Spirit brood over ("overshadow") the womb of the virgin Mary thus to initiate the new creation (re-creation). (Cf. Gen. 1:2, Gal. 4:4, Luke 1:35, etc.) The handiwork of this last brooding was the perfect human nature of God's Only Begotten, the human nature that was designed to serve as the perfect Altar for His Atoning Sacrifice of His divine nature (Jn. 1:1-3, 1:14). Nor does this mean that He was any the less human because of this divine "overshadowing" (Matt. 1:23). On the contrary, is not sin always more painful, more tragic, more repulsive, to Perfection — Holiness — than it could ever be to us ordinary mortals? Cf. Luke 22:44, Heb. 5:7, Matt. 27:46, Isa. 63:3. This perfect body which was of the Spirit's begetting was by this fact qualitatively prepared to be the perfect Atonement for sin, and so constituted that death had no power over it (Ps. 16:8-10; Acts 2:24-32, 13:35-37). Thus do the basic doctrines of the Christian faith — the Virgin Birth, the Atonement, and the Resurrection — all combine in the divine plan to which each contributes its indispensable part: to reject one of these doctrines is to reject them all.

Finally, this divine begetting of the physical nature of God's Only Begotten makes clear the reason for God's law respecting the constituent elements of the sacrificial altars of the Patriarchal and Jewish Dispensations, namely, that these altars were to be constructed of "unhewn" (that is,

natural) stones (no tool was to be used upon them, Exo. 20:24-25, Deut. 27:5-6). Thus did the altars of olden times serve as types of the Universal Altar (Christ's perfect human nature), just as the sacrificial lambs offered upon them served as types of the Lamb of God, our Passover (1 Cor. 5:7).

To summarize: in the Christian Dispensation, Christ Jesus is our Altar, our Sacrifice, and our one and only Priest (King-Priest after the order of Melchizedek, Ps. 110:4; Heb. 6:20, 7:1-25). It was the Mystery of God's Will, according to His good pleasure, which He purposed in Christ "unto a dispensation of the fulness of the times, to sum up all things in Christ, the things in the heavens, and the things upon the earth; in him, I say, in whom also we were made a heritage, having been foreordained according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his will," etc. (Eph. 1:9-12).

Lesson Forty

THE NEW COVENANT

Scripture Reading: Heb. 8; 2 Cor. 3.

Scriptures to Memorize: "For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (John 1:17). "So that the law is become our tutor to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith is come, we are no longer under a tutor" Gal. 3:24-25). "But now hath he obtained a ministry the more excellent, by so much as he is also the mediator of a better covenant, which hath been enacted upon better promises" (Heb. 8:6).

1. Q. What was the first step in the unfolding of God's Plan of Redemption for man?