

SPECIAL
ARTICLES

Our Contributors

BOOK
REVIEWSGOD'S APOSTLE AND OUR HIGH
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Hebrews iii. 1.

Confession is the act of acknowledging, and then it means that which we acknowledge as true, which we profess to believe, and so it stands for our faith. All who believe in Jesus are called upon to acknowledge Him as Apostle and High Priest. Let us try to learn what the writer meant to teach his fellow countrymen and fellow Christians. This letter is addressed to the Hebrews, and its contents prove that it was written to Jewish Christians who were probably living in Jerusalem. It may have been written in Italy about A.D. 66, shortly before the destruction of Jerusalem. The subject of the letter is the superiority of Christianity to Judaism, and it begins by setting forth the truth that Jesus is higher and greater than the angels through whom the Jews believed the law had been given. The writer then goes on to teach that Jesus was the possessor of an unchangeable priesthood, which would never end, and which He exercises not upon earth but in heaven. Let us, then, consider Jesus first as Apostle and then as High Priest.

God's Apostle.

It may seem strange to think of Jesus as an apostle, but we must recall the meaning of the word. An apostle is one sent forth on a mission, and our word missionary best sets forth its meaning now. Jesus was God's missionary to this world, as He afterwards sent forth apostles to bear witness to Him and to teach the people His truth; so God the Father sent His Son to reveal Himself to men, to teach them the way of life, and to reconcile men to Himself by dying for their sins.

To be an apostle of Jesus it was necessary that a man should have seen Jesus. St. Paul wrote: "Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?" It was necessary that he should be in sympathy with Jesus, and obey Him in all things. How truly in these respects is Jesus the Apostle of God. He was in the beginning with God, and was God—being one with the Father, for he said: "I and the Father are one." He told Nicodemus that He spoke of what He knew and bore witness of what He had seen of heavenly things. He said: "I am come in my Father's name. I am come down from heaven not to do my own will, but the will of Him that sent me. (John vi. 38), and "No man hath seen the Father save He who is from God, He hath seen the Father (v. 46).

Jesus said: My teaching is not of mine, but His that sent me (John vii. 16), and He that sent me is with me—He hath not left me alone, for I do always the things that are pleasing to Him (viii. 29). "I speak the things which I have seen with my Father," and "I came forth and am come from God, for neither have I come of myself, but He sent me" (vv. 38-42). Compare also John viii. 54, and xii. 49, etc.

Truly Jesus was God's Apostle, and "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself." Jesus came to seek and to save the lost, to win men's love and woo them back to God. He came to make known the heart of God, and under the record of all He

said and did, we should read His own words, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (John xiv. 9).

His words were full of grace and truth. Words of love, when he said:—"Come unto Me . . . and I will give you rest," and words of power when speaking to the storm-tossed sea He said, "Peace, be still."

His deeds were works of mercy, and He went about doing good, healing the sick, giving sight to the blind, strength to the weak, and restoring life to the dead.

It was His sorrow that the people would not come to Him that they might have life, and at last He wept over Jerusalem and said "How often have I desired to gather thy children to me as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings, and you would not come. Oh, that thou hadst known, even thou, at this time the things that belong to thy peace, but now they are hid from thine eyes."

Truly Jesus was God's apostle to our sinful race, and "the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world." So, as St. John writes, "God's love has been manifested in that He has sent His only Son into the world, that we may have life through Him" (1 John iv. 9). Jesus is the apostle of God's love. He came on a mission of love, and his message is a message of love and forgiveness. To all who receive Him, i.e., to all who trust Him, He still gives the right to become the children of God.

Let us receive Jesus as God's apostle and obey His words.

Jesus is Our High Priest.

In Old Testament times the chief priest was to enter once a year into the Holy of Holies and sprinkle the blood of the sacrifice for himself and for the people upon the Mercy Seat. Jesus had no sins to confess. He claimed to be without sin. He dared anyone to convict Him of sin. He was the only sinless man who has ever lived. But he became sin for us. St. Paul wrote: "He—i.e., God—has made Him who knew nothing of sin to be sin for us in order that in Him we may become the righteousness of God." St. Peter wrote: "He bore our sins in His own body on the tree that we having died unto sin might live unto righteousness." So all who believe are set free from sin through the offering of Jesus Christ as our sacrifice once for all (Heb. ix. 26), and our great High Priest after offering for sins a single sacrifice of perpetual efficacy took His seat at God's right hand. (Heb. x. 12-14). In these days, the days of the New Covenant, sealed by Christ's blood and made sure to us by this resurrection and ascension to the right hand of God, there is no need of any other sacrifice for sin, and all who offer such sacrifices are blind and know not the truth. We have one High Priest who has passed into the heavens and who ever liveth to make intercession for us. This being so, He is able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, and as we have not a High Priest who is unable to feel for us in our weakness, but One who was tempted as we are and yet did not sin, we may come boldly to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our times of need. . . .

We need no human intercessor, and no man has a right to place himself between our souls and God. Christ is our High Priest. He receives our prayers and presents them to the Father. And He is a Priest for ever, for He is the true Melchisedek—being both King of Righteousness and King of Peace. No man could take this office upon himself, but only accepted it when called to it by God, as Aaron was.

The Lord Jesus was anointed a priest for ever (Heb. v. 6), and no one can act for Him. Once for all He has entered the holy place, not taking with him the blood of goats and calves (as the High Priests of old did), but His own blood, and thus He has procured for us eternal redemption. (Heb. ix. 12). For by a single offering He has for ever completed the blessing for those whom He is setting free from sin. (Heb. x. 14). No one can repeat it—it is an insult to God to pretend to do so, for Christ's single sacrifice has perpetual efficacy. Before Christ came, sacrifice was the centre of worship, and it foreshadowed His love, His atonement, and His sacrifice of reconciliation to God by His blood. Sin had set all men at enmity with God. The Lord Jesus Christ took away sin by the sacrifice of Himself upon the cross, and He alone can deal with God for us. No saints, no angels can help us even if we could make them know our need—but to seek their help is to dishonor our Lord. His intercession is perpetual and prevailing. It is not carried on by words and pleadings. Christ's simple presence in our nature at God's right hand secures for us the blessings, obtained for us by His death. "Christ's intercession in heaven is a kind and powerful remembrance of His people and all their concerns, managed with state and majesty, not as a suppliant at the footstool, but as a crowned prince on the throne at the right hand of the Father." . . .

By His death upon the cross the Lord Jesus made an end of sacrifice. There had been an endless round of sacrifice and crowds of sacrificing priests from the early days of mankind, but now they are out of date, vain and useless. Real Christianity stands alone in having no altar, no sacrifice, no priestly class to offer sacrifices for the rest of the people. Every believer can enter now into the holiest of all. He can offer himself to God for His service, and he can offer the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving for himself. All believers belong to a new and holy priesthood, and are appointed to offer spiritual sacrifices which are acceptable to God through Jesus Christ, viz., the sacrifice of praise and of gifts (see Heb. xiii., 15, 16), and St. Paul wrote: "I beseech you, therefore, brethren by the mercies of God to present your bodies (i.e., all our faculties of mind and strength of body) as a living and holy sacrifice to Him." Rom. 12. They who do not see enough in the finished work of Christ to satisfy their consciences as to the forgiveness of sins, know nothing spiritually of what He has done for us by His death and resurrection. . . .

The world asks "why should we not be allowed to worship God as we like? Why should we not be charitable and let others do as they like?" If we choose to have priest and sacrifices although the Lord Jesus has "offered one sacrifice for sins for ever," why should we not be permitted to have them? If we can excite religious feeling by bowing down before a crucifix, although God has said: "Thou shalt not bow down before the likeness of anything in heaven or earth," can it be wrong to stimulate our religious emotions so? If by praying to the Virgin and to saints some people relieve their souls and think they have a greater assurance of being heard, although God has bidden us draw near to Him in perfect confidence, and Jesus said:—"No man cometh to the Father but by me," why should they not put Mary and the saints in the place of the Lord Jesus? . . .

After this fashion many people reason even now. They want a religion made to suit them, but all such religion is vain. It suited Cain to offer the fruits