

ON A HILL TOO FAR AWAY - Fifteen Protestant Truths About the Death of God the Son - Part Five

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Jesus Christ Died To Abolish Both the Ritual Of Circumcision And The Earthly Priesthood By Becoming The Eternal High Priest Of All Those Who Come To Him In Saving Faith

Galatians 6:14-15 - "But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. [15] For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation."

Hebrews 9:24-26 - "For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. [25] Nor was it to offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the holy places every year with blood not his own, [26] for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself."

Hebrews 10:9-14 - "...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."

What I am trying to say in that long, convoluted title is the death of Jesus Christ has consequences that go beyond the merely *personal* and *internal*. Christ's death effects forever the mechanics of worship and the corporate structures and practices of the collective people of God here on earth.

The Church is the Body of Christ. It is birthed in Christ's death and resurrection from the dead. It is fundamentally a *new* organism, created, not by man, but by God through the work of the Holy Spirit. And the way the church *approaches Father God* is not left to chance or human ingenuity. From the beginning of creation God has had a plan - a *goal* - in mind for the church, and it all has its foundation in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Today we will focus on two important issues - ongoing issues - in terms of their shaping power in the practice and focus of the church. The first is the place of *external place and ritual* in the establishing of salvation. The second is the role of the *earthly priesthood* in enabling the approach of sinful people into the presence and grace of Father God. And what I want to show in this teaching is that the death of Jesus brought about *permanent, radical changes* in the way both *outward ritual* and the *earthly priesthood* fit into salvation and church life.

And I also want to deal with the question, *"Why does it matter?"* Can't we just let each one do his or her own thing? Can't we just allow for the fact that there will always be differences of opinion and churches of all stripes can make up their own mind? After all, aren't we all approaching the same God? Why make waves? Why be divisive or contrary? This is the new Post Modern age and seekers of truth are all melding into one body. As one of my minister friends nearby keeps telling me, *"Rules are gone now! Freedom is all that counts!"*

1) **SINCE JESUS CHRIST DIED AND ROSE AGAIN, NO OUTWARD EXERCISE OR RITUAL CAN EVER AGAIN BE GRANTED SAVING STATUS FOR MANKIND**

To show the effect of Christ's death and resurrection on outward observances and rituals for salvation one has only to turn to the pages of the New Testament. The key issue of note is that of *circumcision*. We can't even imagine how much of a flash-point this issue was for the early church. God is the One who had commanded circumcision (**Genesis 17:10**). Jesus Himself was a Jew. The first apostles were all Jews. Virtually all of the first converts were Jews. The Jewish Old Testament was, and is, a valid part of the sacred Scriptures.

Then Gentiles began to get saved, and this created enormous problems because none of them was circumcised. And God, it seemed, was not *commanding* them to be circumcised. Now that they had come to faith in Jesus as the Christ who died for their sins, what was *their* relationship to the ritual of circumcision? Did circumcision have saving value *after* the death and

resurrection of Jesus? It all came to a head at Antioch of Syria:

Acts 15:5-9,11-12 - "But some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up and said, "It is necessary to circumcise them and to order them to keep the law of Moses." [6] The apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider this matter. [7] And after there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, "Brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. [8] And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us, [9] and he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith.....[11]....But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will." [12] And all the assembly fell silent, and they listened to Barnabas and Paul as they related what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles."

Peter says circumcision served a religious purpose *only* until Jesus Christ came and died and rose again. Peter calls these events the "*word of the gospel*" (8), and also says that since that time - since the "*word of the gospel*" was proclaimed - both Jews and Gentiles are saved by believing that message - "**But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will**" (11). They are saved by *believing the message*, plus nothing else.

Circumcision was *preparatory*. It *separated* one people from everyone else, just as the church would be called apart from the world around it. It modeled *obedience* to the command of the Lord, just as all would be commanded to call upon the Name of the Lord and be saved. And it proved people's acceptance of doing what God said *on God's own terms*, just as the church doesn't invent its own message of the means and terms of salvation. Circumcision *isn't* seeker sensitive. No man alive would *personally choose* circumcision unless God were the one commanding it.

In all these ways circumcision modeled the kind of trust and obedience that would one day be finalized and completed in obediently receiving, on God own terms, His final plan of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. Only now the circumcision wasn't an *outward* circumcision of the flesh. And it wasn't just for the male sex. It was a circumcision of the *heart*, based on the same trust and the same obedience that was demonstrated in outward, physical circumcision. And it was for all people:

The New Testament repeatedly marks this contrast between two kinds of circumcision - one passing away, and one eternal and life producing:

Philippians 3:2-3 - "Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh. [3] For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh...."

Paul says there is a *true* circumcision and there is a *false* circumcision. And the bottom line is the *false* circumcision puts its confidence in the *sign - in the flesh*. It banks its future in God on the receiving of the *ritual* of circumcision. The *true* circumcision - the inward circumcision of the *heart* - puts all its confidence in Christ Jesus alone.

People all over the world have their outward circumcisions. They have altars, they have idols and statues, many are still relying on outward circumcision itself. There are fountains, special waters, incense, and a host of other things. Since Christ has come and died and risen from the grave, *none* of these has value to save the soul. Worship itself has been transformed from special places and seasons to faith in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit:

John 4:20-24 - "Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship." [21] Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. [22] You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. [23] But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. [24] God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."

"The hour is coming, and is now here...." (23). *Jesus*, in His own person, marks the great *time change* in worship customs for God's people. It's all tied up in Him and His saving death and resurrection. The role of ritual is now forever changed. There may be routines and symbols that *aid the mind in focusing on Jesus Christ*. But, and this is the great danger, they must never be allowed, even gradually, to creep into an *essential* role. Only Jesus saves.

Why be so picky? Why can't people just sort this out for themselves and rely on the love of God? Why not leave room for

personal preference? Because, says Paul, we aren't left to pick and choose our path to spiritual satisfaction the way one picks vegetables from a buffet. Paul says these roads to God are **mutually exclusive**. Just like many of those on-line computer forms where you select one circle, you can't **select** one without **de-selecting** the other.

Galatians 5:1-2 - "For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

[2] Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you."

Genuine love for the confused will always care enough to keep them from leaving the road of the Cross.

2) **SINCE JESUS CHRIST DIED AND ROSE AGAIN THE OFFICE OF THE EARTHLY PRIESTHOOD AS A HUMAN DOORWAY TO FATHER GOD IS FOREVER ABOLISHED**

I still remember an Easter video we showed depicting the great earthquake and then the veil in the Temple being torn from top to bottom. One could get the impression it was the **earthquake** that caused the massive tear in the veil. Matthew's gospel account, however, is very specific. **First** the veil was torn from top to bottom. **Then** the earthquake came and shook Jerusalem. The earthquake couldn't be mistaken as the **cause** of the tearing of the Temple veil.

This is the significance of the heavy curtain in the temple being torn in two from **top** to **bottom**. Something was opening up that had been closed up to that time. And what it means today is no earthly priest makes an opening to God's presence **for** you, the sinner. It means there is no longer only a **few** who can come into the presence of God, but **all** can come through Christ Jesus. And that change took place, very significantly, at the **exact moment of Christ's death**. His death was the one sacrifice that rocked the world more than all the earthquakes put together.

This is wonderful, powerful news. It transforms the entire world of religion. It changes mankind's approach to God. The rules are suddenly forever different. Look at how the New Testament itself describes it:

Hebrews 9:24-26 - "For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. [25] Nor was it to offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the holy places every year with blood not his own, [26] for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself."

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There is one precious truth packed up in that disclaimer in **verse 11** - "**....offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins....**" If those sacrifices could **never** take away sins, and yet God still **honored** those sacrifices, and if God is absolutely just, God **must** have planned a way of making up for what those earthly sacrifices couldn't do.

That's it exactly. Jesus is the completion of all those sacrifices. Jesus is **perfect** where earthly priests have always been **sinful**. Jesus is **eternal** where earthly priests are **mortal**, grow old and die. Jesus suffered for us, in those grand old words from Hebrews, "**once for all!**" Three words could never tell a fuller, richer, more majestic story.

When I was a small boy my mother would pray with me when I went to bed. Every night she led me to pray that Jesus would forgive my sins. There were four boys in the family and I guess my parents just assumed that, whenever four boys were together all day, it was just a given that there were sins that needed to be forgiven. And I never did anything but **assume** that Jesus **would** and **did** forgive all my sins even though I wasn't in a church or at an altar. Nor was my mother a priest. **Jesus** did the forgiving and I was able to come at any time because that's what His death on the cross accomplished.

Rejoice, church, in the access we have to the throne of God. But it never comes through any earthly priest. It comes through the complete work of the Great High Priest, Jesus Christ, at the hand of God Almighty. This is why, in Christ Jesus, we are **all** a kingdom of priests unto God. In Christ Jesus, we have access to Father God, each one for himself or herself. Jesus Christ, our Great High Priest, keeps the door open to Father God's throne. We can come with our own sin and our

own need. The curtain has never been sewn up.