



# “Semper Reformanda”

## Study 3: The Priesthood Of Christ (Heb. 7:14-28)

o The principle of “semper reformanda” requires that the church submit to Christ’s priesthood.

### I. The significance of Christ’s priesthood.

1. Christ’s high-priesthood is taught in detail in Heb. 7-10. In the OT, the high-priest officiated in the worship at the tabernacle and the temple. The high-priest had to be appointed from among the priests, the descendants of Aaron, of the tribe of Levi.

- Christ’s high-priesthood was of the order of Melchizedek (Heb. 5:6; 6:20; 7:15, 17 cf. Ps. 110:4; Gen. 14:18-20). It is superior to the priesthood of Aaron and the Levites (Heb. 7:11, 16, 22; 8:1-6).
- Christ needed no sacrifice for Himself (Heb. 7:27). He offered up Himself as the perfect sacrifice for His people (Heb. 9:12-14, 25-26; Matt. 20:28).
- As our high-priest, Christ continues to intercede for His people in heaven (7:25; 9:24). He is able to sympathise with those who are tempted (Heb. 2:18; 4:15).

2. In the life of the church, priesthood is concerned with worship, prayer, and the pastoral care of God’s people. Practically, submission to the priesthood of Christ will be shown in the following ways.

- First, the worship services will be in accordance to the Regulative Principle. This is a characteristic of Reformed churches. The RP basically states that in the worship of God, whatever is commanded by the word of God must be followed while anything not commanded is to be rejected. The opposing principle was in the past called the Normative Principle, which states that whatever is not forbidden by the word of God may be allowed (or, is permissible. Since the Bible teaches by commands, precepts, instructions, and examples we have often to establish the “norm” from the “exception” to follow. It is better, therefore, to refer to the opposing principle as the Permissible Principle.
- Second, the prayer meeting of the church is important. It is for good reasons that we have “the high-priestly prayer” of our Lord in John 17, which sets an example for the pastoral prayer in a worship service and also for corporate prayer. Church members must not neglect the prayer meetings of the church, just as they should not neglect the two main services on the Lord’s day. (The fourth commandment requires that the day be kept holy, which began with worship and ended with worship (Exod. 20:8-11 cf. Num. 28:10 cf 4).)
- Third, pastoral care of the members is part-and-parcel of church life. Different churches place different emphasis on this and carry this out in different ways. Extremes must be avoided - that of heavy shepherding, and that of non-existent shepherding. Most personal problems are resolved when members attend the public meetings regularly to hear God’s word and be in fellowship with others. The principle of “the priesthood of all believers”

require that we minister to one another instead of relying totally on the elders of the church to help us in our spiritual life (Exod. 19:6; 1 Pet. 2:9 cf. 1 Cor. 12:26). Mature members should look out for the welfare of weaker members (Matt. 18:6).

3. We have seen how the Evangelicals in the 20th century split into three camps after countering Theological Liberalism - the Reformed, the Fundamentalist, and the Neo-Evangelical camps. A fourth camp arose, viz. the Charismatic camp, which became particularly influential from the 1960s.

- As the 21st century dawned, *Postmodernism* set in. There is disillusionment with the rationalism of Modernism, and the subjectivism of the Charismatic movement. There was a revival of interest in Reformed theology at about the time of the Charismatic renewal of the 1960s, so that two strands of influence came into play - Charismatism and Reformed teaching.
- The Neo-evangelicals embrace Postmodern characteristics such as the seeker-sensitive approach to evangelism, singing of choruses and gospel songs, and the practise of contemporary worship.
- Some from the Fundamentalist and the Neo-Evangelical camps have embrace Calvinistic doctrines while others are influenced by Charismatism. The Fundamentalist Calvinists are cessationists while the Neo-evangelical Calvinists are non-cessationists (or continuationists) who also practise contemporary worship. The Fundamentalist Calvinists would not identify themselves as "Reformed" as they are non-confessional nor hold to Reformed Theology. The Neo-Evangelical Calvinists would call themselves "Reformed" when in reality they hold only to Calvinistic soteriology and not to Reformed theology, are non-confessional, and practise contemporary worship. They have been called the New Calvinists.

## II. Its implications.

1. We have seen that it is possible to have fellowship with Fundamentalist and Neo-evangelical churches that are Arminian in soteriology, depending on how much other truths we share in common. It is difficult to have fellowship with Neo-Evangelical churches that have adopted Charismatic beliefs and practices, or are involved in the modern Ecumenical movement. The Ecumenical movement advocate visible, organisational, unity among churches at the expense of truth.
  - Apart from doctrine, the issues involved also determine to some extent the interaction we have with others. In relief work during a natural disaster, we co-operate with non-Christians (atheists, Roman Catholics, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, politicians, social-workers, etc.), and we work in fellowship with other Evangelicals. *Co-operation* is different from *fellowship*, which involves acknowledging one another as brethren in Christ. For us, inter-faith worship is not possible.
2. Many churches new to the Reformed faith fail to extend the work of reformation to worship.
  - Not only do the special ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper fall under the purview of the priesthood of Jesus Christ, the style of worship does as well. The Regulative Principle of worship must be applied to the types of songs sung, the instruments used, and the overall spirit/mood of the worship created. Leviticus 10:3 shows that worship must arise from a heart of reverence for God and be concerned for its witness to others. We posit traditional worship consistent with the Regulative Principle, over against contemporary worship.

- Others fail to emphasise the importance of the corporate prayer meeting. It is not a good idea to combine the church prayer meeting with Bible Study as each will be weakened by the lack of time. Many churches have succumbed to the influence of Charismaticism in practising simultaneous prayer, contrary to the principles of *understanding* and *orderliness* of the Bible (1 Cor. 14:8-9, 12, 16; 14:31, 40).
  - Pastoral care should not be narrowly focussed on pastoral visitation, but be extended to the nurture of spiritual maturity in the members. Spiritual maturity is shown not only by growth in knowledge of God's word, but also by prayerfulness and a concern for the welfare of others. Church members must not only grow in spiritual knowledge, but also in involvement in the life of the church.
- = Submission to Christ's priesthood requires the adoption of biblical worship, a high regard for corporate prayer, and the practice of biblical pastoral oversight.

### **Review Questions**

1. Which part of the Bible gives detailed teaching on the high-priesthood of Christ?
2. As high-priest, what did Christ do, and continues to do, for His people?
3. Priesthood is concerned with what three matters in the life of the church?
4. What principle governs worship in Reformed churches?
5. What are the characteristics of Neo-Evangelical churches that have adopted Postmodernism?
6. What are the differences between the Fundamentalist Calvinists and the Neo-Evangelical Calvinists?
7. Why are Neo-Evangelical Calvinists not truly Reformed?
8. In our interaction with others, what is the difference between co-operation and fellowship?
9. Why is simultaneous prayer wrong?
10. How must we view pastoral care in the life of the church?

### **Assignment/Discussion**

The extremes of heavy shepherding and non-existent shepherding are to be avoided. What are the roles of the pastor, the elders and the members in the work of pastoral oversight?

### **Memory passage (Heb. 9:11-15)**

11 But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. 12 Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. 13 For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, 14 how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? 15 And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.

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