

Melchizedek Priesthood

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In this incredible new day of the church, we have an opportunity to re-examine why we have held on to certain old paradigms. The one we're looking at right now is - why do we continue to have Levitical type church structures? Why do we continue to have Levitical style worship?

The answer is basically because archaic ideas have passed down from generations. Many complex factors restructured early Christian church thought. After about 300 AD, the religious world was filled with errors and oppression. The earliest Church Fathers taught that Jesus chose only the original twelve apostles to function as “PRIESTS.”

Of course, this was NOT the case. The Levitical priesthood was in no way extended into the beginning of the church era.

But because of these exclusionary decisions of these influential leaders, most of the world found themselves once again outsiders unable to obtain the intended and precious New Testament reality of leadership.

Now finally, most of us realize we hold a universal priesthood... but it has been rather ineffective because we assumed that it was a Levitical priesthood!

The assumption that the “Levitical priesthood” is the fundamental typology for leadership in the church and in our home is totally incorrect.

The whole hierarchical structure of “priesthood” – including the presumed supremacy (the separation of clergy and laity), and the institution of endless routines of services, worship, and vestments -- all stem from later influences of the Church Fathers.

To discuss this concept further, we need to look at the reason for the Levitical priesthood. As we know, Israel's Levitical priests performed ritualistic rites on behalf of the people. The Levitical priesthood (also that of Eli and Zadok) was based on heredity. They officiated at the altar of the Tabernacle, giving burnt offerings and rituals sacrifice in the Holy place. The priests killed animals, ceremonially offering them on the temple altar to God to atone for the sins of the people. These imperfect sacrifices were given in order to bring sinful people back into communion with a Holy God. Priests were the mediators and the only interpreters of the God's Law.

Qualifications to be a Levitical priest.

Only men could be priests. But, not all men could be priests! He had to be from the tribe of Levi, between the age of 25 and 50. He could not be blind, defected, hunchbacked or a dwarf. Injuries would make him not eligible. A skin disease or crushed private parts disqualified him to serve (Lev. 21:17- 24).

These priests must be married to a virgin -- one who was never a prostitute, nor divorced, widowed, nor raped. Every individual sexual act with his wife rendered the priest “unclean” and disqualified him temporarily from service. These priests, who were chosen because they appeared to be perfect physical specimens, usually failed miserably! Often they were wicked (1 Sam. 2:22-25, 4:11), didn't seek after the Lord (2:8), didn't rule with God's authority (5:30-31), and dealt falsely with people (6:13).

When Israel finally built a permanent dwelling for Yahweh at the Temple in Jerusalem, the priest's job was basically ritual offering and sacrifices. Meanwhile, the prophets became the proclaimers of God's message to the people. When the temple was destroyed in 586 BC, the Hebrews were taken to Babylon. There, the Priest could not be utilized because there was no temple and therefore all sacrifices ceased.

As the function of the Levitical Priests stopped, the prophets roamed the land ushering God's directive concerning social, moral, and political actions.

Silence.

Suddenly, after the time of Malachi, the prophets were temporarily silenced. The world had no recorded voice of God for 400 years, until Gabriel announced the birth of John the Baptist, who would proclaim, “Prepare the Way!”

During that 400-year silence, the scribe became the expounder of the Torah and he provided the knowledge of the Law.

The itinerant scribe or sage was the norm. He was called the "Rabbi" or master and teacher. The sage continued to function in Jewish society during the first century and he trained students and taught the masses. Perhaps thousands of rabbis circulated in the most remote parts of the country. They rarely took money for teaching the Torah, and they often practiced trades to support themselves.

Herod the Great, 18 BC (whose very name meant "Trembling") restored the temple and restored the Levitical priestly ritual and animal sacrifice. Once again the high priest emerged. The powerful president of the Jewish council was called the Sanhedrin; they had oversight of the temple.

Into this structure, Jesus appeared and the Church began.

• The New Testament church didn't pattern itself after the Jewish temple. Jesus never taught believers to be Levitical priests. Instead, Jesus taught these leaders to be servants. The disciples were cautioned not to be called rabbi or teacher (Mt.23:8-11). Christ, THE high priest (Heb. 3:1, 7:24), brought an end to daily animal sacrifice; for He completed the sacrifice. The Aaronic (Levitical) priesthood was no longer needed.

How the Levitical notion returned:

At the start of the fourth century, Constantine led a military forced conversion. Once again, he pushed the priesthood concept forward. Ultimately, Constantine spearheaded the Nicene council (325) where the priest became the dominant power in civil and social government and received official status. During this era, the image of the Catholic priest progressed from being the victim of Roman executioners, into being the most powerful and prosperous force in society. It was at this time that the clergy were set apart from the congregation.

Because of the forced conversion of Western Europe during the Middle Ages, everyone called themselves a "Christian." At this point, being a Christian meant that they were baptized and belonged to a parish where all religious, economic and political matters were handled. Because the male clergy were the only ones who could read and write, all the statistics concerning census and records of events were kept (by men) at the parish.

Priests were ordered to avoid "impure" female company. The rise of monasticism brought about a tradition of celibacy for clergy. This all-male priesthood was assigned power superseding moral law, civil law, and human choice. As the centuries passed, this all-male priesthood self-perpetuated. Soon, the mysterious sacramental Body of Christ became an all male-governed group.

There was no possibility of challenge the priesthood from within this organized structure of carefully selected priests.

Summary:

The Levitical priesthood system demonstrates the futility of human effort. It was not the pattern for New Testament church leadership.

1. If we use the Old Testament male priesthood model for the modern church pattern for today, then no Gentile, no handicapped man, single man, dwarf, nor most Jewish men could qualify.
2. The Old Testament idea of the priest being the mediator between God and man was only necessary until the death of Jesus Christ. Now, Christ, our High Priest has the ministry of mediation (Heb. 7:25) and He gives us all the right to be priests after His nature.
3. The work of the Old Testament priest was finished when Christ fulfilled the law and "Entered the most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption" (Heb. 9:12).
4. God no longer accepted sacrifices of bulls and goats. New Testament believers were all priests who only offered the sacrifice of praise, with the fruit of their lips giving thanks -- the only sufficient sacrifice. Offering praise to God becomes our spiritual (not sacramental) sacrifice. Jesus remains as our only "High Priest," the perfect sacrifice that never needs to be repeated.
5. The concept of New Testament Levitical priests is unscriptural.
6. Jesus never appointed or designated His apostles to return to the OLD priesthood type of function. Jesus brought forth a brand new priesthood -- of believers. Jesus instituted a kingdom of priests -- all tribes and people, and every believer. Jesus was a priest after the order of Melchizedek. He gave that priesthood to all of us.

Twelve Apostles

In the Levitical priest system, there were only Israelite men - - no Gentiles, no blue eyed people, no Samaritans, no blond haired men, no soldiers, no slaves, and no women.

Jesus did not intend for his apostleship to be elite or haughty. It was not distinguished by racial similarity or gender. In fact, many of my books discuss how women were known in early church history as "apostles." Apostleship selection was NOT based on hereditary, nor determined by race. Jesus chose the ones that were supposed to be chosen.

God clearly chose leaders according to character and ability.

We must stress again that the leadership definition of the early church varied from one location to another. The criterion was not uniformity, but rather, obtaining the best leadership needed to meet the needs of each locality.

Much of what is traditionally taught today is not the INTENTION of the Scriptures. Jesus clearly moved us to another Priesthood. His was the order of Melchizedek. While the Levitical priesthood is determined by birth, ALL BELIEVERS qualify for the Melchizedek by our new-birth. The Melchizedek priesthood was on earth before the Levitical system.

We must transition our priesthood. We must change out of the old order of Levitical worship, and rethink our position IN CHRIST. It's time to change our methodology of leadership. It is time at last to move into the expectation of the phenomenal blessing of this new order.

It is the POWER of the ENDLESS LIFE.

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