

THE HEAVENLY CHRIST

in the Epistle to the Hebrews

BY RON KANGAS

Christians need to reconsider what they think and say about Christ. In Matthew 22:42 the Lord Jesus asked a crucial question: “What do you think concerning the Christ?” This has been called “the question of questions,” and as such it is unavoidable and must be answered by everyone. What concepts do we hold and what notions do we cherish concerning Christ? Does our idea of Him match what God has revealed regarding Him in the New Testament? Since what we think is invariably related to what we say, we need to respond to another question asked by the Lord (Matt. 16:13-15). First, He asked, “Who do men say that the Son of Man is?” The disciples replied, “Some, John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” Then He said to them, “But you, who do you say that I am?” “What do you think concerning the Christ?” “Who do you say that I am?” Every believer in Christ and every seeker of Christ needs to respond to these questions.

Our response involves what Paul describes as “the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord” (Phil. 3:8). Paul’s knowledge of Christ began with a question that he uttered spontaneously at the moment of his conversion: “Who are You, Lord?” (Acts 9:5). Immediately the Lord replied, “I am Jesus, whom you persecute....I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a minister and a witness both of the things in which you have seen Me and of the things in which I will appear to you” (26:15-16). This word was confirmed by Ananias: “The God of our fathers has previously appointed you to know His will and to see the righteous One and to hear the voice from His mouth; for you will be a witness to Him unto all men of the things which you have seen and heard” (22:14-15). Paul was chosen to see Christ and hear Christ and thereby to receive the excellency of the knowledge of Christ, which would qualify him to experience Christ, to enjoy Christ, and to be a witness of Christ.

The excellency of the knowledge of Christ is derived from

the excellency of His person gradually unveiled to Paul. Because Paul received a revelation concerning Christ and His excellency, he spontaneously possessed the excellency of the knowledge of Christ. This was not the knowledge that belongs to Christ, the knowledge that Christ has; rather, it was Paul’s excellent knowledge of Christ, the outcome of his vision of “the excellency, the supereminence, the supreme preciousness, the surpassing worth of Christ” (Lee, *Philippians* 157). For the sake of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ in His excellency, Paul counted all things to be loss (Phil. 3:8). Paul’s pursuit of Christ (v. 12) began with a question—“Who are You, Lord?”—and from then on his entire life was devoted to the progressive unfolding of God’s answer to his question. Paul surely knew what he thought concerning Christ and what he had to say regarding Him. Unfortunately, many of today’s Christians do not possess, and may not even aspire to possess, the excellency of the knowledge of Christ treasured by Paul. They have been hindered in gaining the excellent knowledge of Christ.

Hindrances to the Excellency of the Knowledge of Christ

Leaving the best love. There are several reasons for this abnormal situation, the most important of which is identified by the Lord Jesus in Revelation 2:4: “I have one thing against you, that you have left your first love.” The first love for the Lord is the best love for Him—our love for Him as our Bridegroom. To love the Lord with the best love requires that we set our entire tripartite being absolutely on Him, that is, “to let our entire being be occupied by Him and lost in Him, so that He becomes everything to us and we are one with Him practically in our daily life” (Recovery Version, 1 Cor. 2:9, note 3).

Being content with limited knowledge and experience. Related to forsaking the first love for the Lord is the contentment and satisfaction with a limited knowledge and experience of Christ. Many, satisfied with an elementary and superficial

knowledge of Christ, are content with knowing the Lord only as their “personal Savior” and have no interest in advancing in their knowledge of Christ. This can lead to an attitude of indifference toward the Lord and His word and also to the practice of taking things for granted, instead of earnestly seeking the Lord for light and understanding concerning Christ as He is revealed in books such as Colossians and Hebrews.

Not being poor in spirit. Another reason for the common lack of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ is the fact that so few believers are “poor in spirit.” “Blessed are the poor in spirit,” the Lord Jesus tells us in Matthew 5:3, “for theirs is the kingdom of the heavens.” Our spirit, which is distinct and different from our soul (1 Thes. 5:23; Heb. 4:12), is the organ deep within us created by God for us to contact God, receive God, contain God, and assimilate God. To be poor in spirit is not to have a poor spirit. Rather, to be poor in spirit is to be emptied in our human spirit, in the deepest part of our being, and thus to have the capacity to receive something new and fresh from the Lord concerning Himself. To be poor in spirit means that nothing other than God is filling our spirit, that our spirit has been emptied of everything other than God. All believers should be empty in their spirit, ready to exercise their spirit to contact God and to receive more of God. Unfortunately, most believers have something other than God filling their spirit and thus cannot advance in knowing the Lord. They are so filled, even saturated, with things other than God that there is no room in their spirit for God.

Being filled with old things. Instead of being unloaded and emptied in their spirit, many believers in Christ are filled with the old things of religion and tradition and simply are not open and able to receive further light from the Word of God concerning Christ. A sense of oldness (a sign of spiritual death) pervades their Christian life and retards their spiritual development. Because such believers are filled and satisfied with old things, they desire nothing new (Luke 5:39).

Being unwilling to pay the price. Whereas some are preoccupied with the old things, others are not willing to pay the price to gain something new concerning Christ. Our eternal salvation is extended to us free of charge, for the price was paid for us by the Lord in His redemptive death. Although eternal salvation is free, progress in Christ demands that we pay a price. In keeping with the Lord’s word in Revelation 3:18, we need to “buy” from Him: “I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined by fire that you may be rich, and white garments that you may be clothed...and eyesalve to anoint your eyes that you may see.” Buying gold, white garments, and eyesalve requires that we pay a price, and paying a price entails suffering some kind of loss. For the sake of Christ, Paul was willing to pay the price and suffer loss: “What things were gains to me, these

I have counted loss on account of Christ” (Phil. 3:7). Certain things of religion, culture, and ethnic identity were “gains” to Paul, but on account of Christ, he counted these things loss. Then he went on to say, “I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as refuse that I may gain Christ and be found in Him” (vv. 8-9a). As one who was willing to suffer loss by paying the price, Paul advanced in knowing, experiencing, and enjoying Christ. Regrettably, a great many Christians today do not advance in knowing the Lord because they are not willing to pay the price.

Being frustrated by traditional Christology. Others, as a contrast, love the Lord very much and are willing to pay the price to gain Him, but they are frustrated by the restrictions placed upon them by traditional Christology. To be sure, heresy concerning the person of Christ will hinder us from knowing Christ. This is obvious. Something less obvious is the fact that adherence to traditional, orthodox Christology can hinder us from perceiving the totality of what is revealed concerning Christ in the holy Scriptures. This means that even an orthodox Christology can become a replacement for the all-inclusive Christ Himself. The proper biblical Christology bears witness to the all-inclusiveness and extensiveness of Christ (Eph. 3:18-19) and thereby assists the believers in gaining the excellency of the knowledge of Christ.

Lacking revelation. Another cause of deficiency with respect to the knowledge of Christ is a serious shortage of revelation concerning Christ. Some quibble over the words *enlightenment* and *revelation*, claiming that we need the former but not the latter. However, according to Paul’s prayer in Ephesians 1:17-18a we need both: “That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of Him, the eyes of your heart having been enlightened.” We do not need, and we cannot have, a revelation of Christ beyond what is written in the Bible, but we certainly need, and we must have, a revelation of the Christ unveiled in the Bible. Actually, we need not only revelation but *a spirit of revelation*, and we need “the God who said, Out of darkness light shall shine,” to shine “in our hearts to illuminate the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor. 4:6). Only then can we know the Christ of God revealed in the Word of God.

Adhering to the principle of antichrist. Perhaps the greatest hindrance to the excellency of the knowledge of Christ is the prevailing influence of the principle of antichrist. In a previous article (“Traditional Theology and the Principle of Antichrist,” Vol. II, No. 3), we pointed out that in varying degrees traditional Christian theology applies the principle of antichrist and that the majority of believers adhere in some way to the principle of antichrist. The principle of antichrist, implied by the fact that the apostle John speaks of “many antichrists” (1 John 2:18), involves any matter

or thing that is either opposed to Christ (against Christ) or that replaces Christ (instead of Christ). Whereas the self is opposed to Christ and must be denied for the sake of Christ, many things are replacements of Christ. Religion, Bible knowledge, theology, the law, philosophy, spiritual gifts, miracles, spirituality, culture, tradition, natural virtues—all these can be replacements of Christ. If we would have the excellency of the knowledge of Christ, we need to learn to repudiate all replacements of Christ and to allow the all-inclusive Christ to become everything to us in a real and practical way.

If we would have
the excellency of the
knowledge of Christ,
we need to learn
to repudiate all
replacements of Christ
and allow the
all-inclusive Christ to
become everything to us in
a real and practical way.

whole book is the Son speaking God” (Lee, *Crucial* 128). The Son of God is God Himself speaking (v. 8). To say that God has spoken to us in the Son, as the opening verses of this Epistle unequivocally affirm, actually means that God speaks in Himself. The fact that God has spoken in the Son and that the Son is God indicates that God speaks in Himself. The Son speaks God, declares God, and defines God (John 1:1, 14, 18). The book of Hebrews is a testimony of God speaking to us in the Son. “God speaks in the Son and the Son speaks by what He is. Whatever He is is His speaking” (Lee, *Crucial* 129).

The aim of this article is to encourage believers to seek Christ and to pursue Christ, especially the heavenly Christ revealed in the book of Hebrews. We will first consider the basic revelation of the person and work of Christ as presented in this Epistle and then survey the aspects of the all-inclusiveness of Christ unveiled in Hebrews. This will bring us to the focal point, both of the book of Hebrews and of this essay—the heavenly Christ, the Christ who is heavenly in place, position, condition, status, and ministry.

The Son of God

In keeping with the New Testament as a whole, the Epistle to the Hebrews reveals that Jesus Christ is the God-man, the complete God and a perfect man. In particular, chapter one unveils that Christ is the Son of God, and chapter two, that He is the Son of Man.

Hebrews 1 presents the Son of God in His divinity from eternity past to eternity future. The Son was the Creator of the earth and the heavens (vv. 10, 2); the Son is the Upholder of all things (v. 3); and the Son is the Heir of all things (v. 2). The Son, having been incarnated for redemption by crucifixion, made purification of sins (v. 3) and then, in and with His humanity, was begotten in resurrection to be the firstborn Son of God (v. 5). In His ascension the Son sat down at the right hand of God in the heavens (v. 3). The Son will come again as the Firstborn (vv. 6-8); the Son will be the King on the throne with the scepter in the kingdom (vv. 8-9); and the Son will remain forever and ever in eternity future (v. 12).

Hebrews opens with these wonderful words: “God, having spoken of old in many portions and in many ways to the fathers in the prophets, has at the last of these days spoken to us in the Son (1:1-2a). “The real subject of the book of Hebrews is God speaking in the Son. In other words, the

Since Hebrews is such a testimony, the Son is the center, the focus, of this book (1:2a, 5, 8; 3:6; 4:14; 5:5, 8; 6:6; 7:3, 28; 10:29). Christ’s being the Son of God implies the expression of God, the issue or coming out, of God (John 1:18). Here we should note that there is an important difference between Christ as the embodiment of God and as the issue of God. As the embodiment of God Christ is related to God’s existence. Christ, as the embodiment of God, is the complete God (Col. 2:9). As the issue of God Christ is God’s expression. As the coming out, the emergence of God, Christ is the expression of God. Drawing upon the Lord’s word in John 4:14, we may say that the Father as the fountain emerges in the Son as the spring. The Son of God is the expressed God, God Himself expressed.

The New Testament reveals that regarding the Son of God there are two aspects: the aspect of the only begotten Son of God and the aspect of the firstborn Son of God. From eternity until the time of His resurrection Christ was the Son of God only in the aspect of the only begotten Son of God (John 1:18; 3:16). According to His deity Christ is, and always will be, the only begotten Son of God. As the only begotten Son Christ has an eternal relationship with the Father in that the Father is the eternal source of the Son and that the Son is the eternal embodiment and expression of the Father. Through resurrection Christ, who had put on human nature through incarnation, became the Son of God in another aspect, the aspect of the firstborn Son of God (Heb. 1:5-6; Rom. 1:3-4; Acts 13:33). As the only begotten Son of God, Christ is the embodiment and expression of the divine life (John 1:4; 1 John 5:11-12). Through resurrection Christ became the firstborn Son of God as the life-dispenser for the propagation of the life embodied in Him (Rom. 1:3-4; 8:10, 6, 11, 29). In His first coming Christ was the only begotten Son, but in His second coming He will be the firstborn Son (Heb. 1:6-8).

Hebrews 1:3 says that, in the Godhead, the Son of God is the effulgence of God's glory and the impress of God's substance. Here glory is a matter of outward expression of God, and substance is a matter of inward essence of God. With respect to glory as the outward expression of God, the Son is the effulgence of God's glory. This effulgence is like the shining of the light of the sun. The Son is the shining, the brightness, of the Father's glory. With respect to substance as the inward essence of God, the Son is the impress of God's substance. This impress is like the impress of a seal. The Son, the impress of God's substance, is the expression of the Father's substance, the expression of what the Father is. Furthermore, for the Son to be the effulgence of God's glory and the impress of God's substance means that the Son is God coming to us, that the Son is God reaching us and coming to be with us (Matt. 1:23). In God's New Testament economy, we have a God who reaches us, a God who comes to us to save us and dispense Himself into us.

Chapter one of Hebrews places particular emphasis on the role of the Son of God in creation and in redemption. In creation the Son of God is the Creator, the Upholder, and the Heir. In the past all things came into existence in Him, through Him, and unto Him (v. 2; John 1:3; 1 Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:16). In the present the Son upholds all things by the word of His power, and all things cohere in Him (Heb. 1:3; Col. 1:17). In the future the Son will be the Heir to inherit all things (Heb. 1:2). In redemption the Son accomplished the purification of sins and, as evidence of the completion of redemption through His earthly ministry, which culminated with His vicarious death on the cross, the Son is now sitting on the right hand of the Majesty on high, waiting for the subduing of His enemies (Heb. 1:3, 13). The Son took away sin and made purification of sins by offering Himself as a sacrifice for our sins once for all (John 1:29; Heb. 10:12; 9:26). The Son's sitting at the right hand of God in the heavens signifies that His redemptive work has been accomplished and that He is resting there (1:13; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2). Now the Son is waiting for the subduing of His enemies, that is, waiting for God to set His enemies as a footstool for His feet (1:13; 10:13).

The Son of Man

Whereas the crucial point in Hebrews 1 is that the Son, in whom God speaks, is God, the crucial point in Hebrews 2 is that the Son is also a man—the Son of Man, a man with blood and flesh who destroyed the devil on the cross (v. 14), who made propitiation for the sins of God's people (v. 17), who was crowned with glory and honor (v. 7), who produced many brothers, or many sons, in addition to Himself as the firstborn Son and made them the church (vv. 11-12), and who is leading these many sons into glory (v. 10) for the eternal, corporate expression of the Triune God in Christ.

Hebrews 2 reveals that Christ is the God-man, “the second man” (1 Cor. 15:47), for the fulfillment of God's purpose. God ordained the man in creation to express Him in His image and to represent Him with His dominion (Gen. 1:26-28); however, the man in creation, the first man, failed God in His purpose. Under the inspiration of God, in Psalm 8:4-8 the psalmist prophesied the recovery of the ordination which was given in Genesis 1 but had been lost. The second man, the Lord Jesus, who has recovered man's lost ordination and has fulfilled God's original purpose, is presented to us in Hebrews 2. The man Jesus, in fulfillment of the prophecy in Psalm 8, was made a little inferior to the angels because of the suffering of death (Heb. 2:9a). After the Lord Jesus had accomplished redemption by suffering death, He was glorified in His resurrection (Luke 24:26), and in His ascension He was crowned with glory and honor (Heb. 2:9b) to be the Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36; 10:36b) and was exalted to be a Leader and a Savior (5:31).

Hebrews 2 reveals not only the person of Christ as the Son of Man but also the process through which He passed in His humanity to accomplish God's purpose. This process involves Christ's incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, glorification, and exaltation. In His incarnation Christ became a man in order to partake of our blood and flesh (v. 14), becoming the same in nature as we are. This He did to bring the infinite God into finite man, to mingle God with man that God and man could be one, to accomplish redemption for man (Rom. 8:3; 1 Pet. 1:18-20; Heb. 9:26, 28, 12; 2:14), to carry out God's salvation in man (1 Tim. 1:15), and to impart the divine life into man (1 John 4:9). Through incarnation Christ was made like His brothers in all things that He might become a merciful and faithful High Priest, who can be touched with the feeling of our weaknesses (Heb. 2:17; 4:15). In His crucifixion Christ tasted death on behalf of everything (2:9; Col. 1:20; 2 Tim. 1:10); He made propitiation for the sins of the people (Heb. 2:17); He destroyed (brought to nought, abolished, annulled) the devil (2:14; Gen. 3:15; Rom. 8:3); and He released us from the slavery under the fear of death (Heb. 2:15). In His resurrection Christ brought forth many brothers (vv. 11-12; 1 Pet. 1:3; John 12:24; Rom. 8:29); He came to His brothers and declared to them the Father's name (Heb. 2:12a); and He praised the Father in the church (v. 12b). In His glorification Christ took the lead to enter into glory as the Pioneer to lead God's many sons into glory (v. 10; 6:20), and He has been crowned with glory and honor (2:9; cf. John 19:2). In His exaltation God gave Christ the dominion over all things (Heb. 2:7; Eph. 1:22-23; Ezek. 1:26), and Christ was made Head over all things (Heb. 2:8; Psa. 110:1; 1 Cor. 15:27).

The All-inclusiveness of Christ

The Epistle to the Hebrews reveals not only that Christ is both God and man, the God-man, but also that Christ is

all-inclusive, that He is the reality of God, man, and every positive thing in the universe and the fulfillment of many Old Testament types.

Apostle. Christ is the Apostle (3:1), the first apostle in the New Testament. The word *apostle* refers to one who is sent by a higher authority. Christ was sent to us by God, from God, and with God (John 6:46; 8:16, 29). As the Apostle Christ came to us from God and with God in order to share God with us, and now we may partake of the divine nature, life, and fullness.

Moses is a type of our Apostle, God's sent One. Moses came from God to serve the people of God in their affliction. When the people of Israel were suffering under the tyranny of Pharaoh, God appeared to Moses and charged him to go to God's people and to Pharaoh and to bring His people out of Egypt (Exo. 3:1-10). As a result of the Lord's appearing and commission, Moses became an Old Testament apostle, God's sent one, who brought the people out of Egypt and led them into the wilderness with the goal of entering the good land for the purpose that they might be formed and constituted into the house of God.

Builder of God's house. As indicated by the type of Moses, Christ's being the Apostle is closely related to His being the Builder of God's house (Heb. 3:2-6). Moses was a part of God's house, but Christ is the Builder of the house (v. 3). As one sent by God to take care of God's house, Moses was faithful to God in His house. This typifies that Christ, the Apostle from God for God's house, is faithful to Him who constituted Him (v. 2).

Christ has two natures: humanity and divinity. Humanity is good as the material for the building of God's house, and divinity is the element of the Builder. In His humanity Christ is actually part of the building, for in His humanity He is the foundation stone (Isa. 28:16), the cornerstone (Matt. 21:42; Acts 4:11), the topstone (Zech. 4:7), and the living stone (1 Pet. 2:4) to produce the believers as living stones for God's spiritual house (v. 5). Christ is not only a part of God's building in His humanity but also the Builder in His divinity (Matt. 16:18). God in Christ is within us to build Himself into our being and to build us into His being (Eph. 3:17; John 14:23), building His divinity into our humanity and building our humanity into His divinity in order to mingle and blend His divinity with our humanity into one entity—God's living, spiritual, organic house (1 Tim. 3:15; 1 Pet. 2:5; Eph. 2:21-22).

God in Christ
is within us to build
Himself into our being and
to build us into
His being in order to
mingle and blend His
divinity with our humanity
into one entity—
God's living, spiritual,
organic house.

Forerunner. Hebrews 6:18b-20a says that the believers "have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us, which we have as an anchor of the soul, both secure and firm and which enters within the veil, where the Forerunner, Jesus, has entered for us." As our Forerunner, the Lord Jesus entered the heavens, the Holy of Holies within the veil (vv. 19-20). By suffering death for us on the cross and by being glorified through resurrection, He "crossed the river" and entered into the region of God's glory, the region of God's expression (2:9). He took the lead to enter into glory—the glorious expression of the Divine Being—and now He is leading us into glory (v. 10). He has cut the way into the very glory where He Himself is and where God desires us to be for His eternal, corporate expression.

The word *anchor* in 6:19 indicates that we are on a stormy sea. However, with Him as the Forerunner "within the veil," there is a refuge, a heavenly haven. As our Forerunner, the Lord Jesus passed through the stormy sea and entered the heavenly haven, where as our High Priest He is interceding for us and ministering to us that we may be brought into glory. Our hope, "which we have as an anchor of the soul," has entered the Holy of Holies within the veil, and we now may also enter this realm in spirit and through faith.

Captain. Hebrews 2:10 says that Christ is the Captain of our salvation. As the Captain of salvation, Christ is leading an army, composed of the believers as His followers, into the glory of the Divine Being, where He now is. On the one hand, Christ is in glory; on the other hand, Christ is in us as the hope of glory (Col. 1:27). As He is leading us into glory, He Himself dwells within us as the very glory into which He is leading us. Concerning this, Witness Lee says:

The salvation of which Christ is the Captain is the salvation that brings us into glory. As our Captain, Christ the Savior took the lead to fight through into glory....In this matter of fighting for glory, He was the Pioneer, for He pioneered the way into glory. Therefore, He is qualified to be the Captain of those who are entering into glory, and He is called the Captain of our salvation....Christ entered into glory as the Pioneer and now He dwells in the full, glorious expression of the divine Being. As the One in glory, He...one day came into us and now dwells in our spirit....He did not leave the glory....He brought the glory into us. This means that when the Captain of salvation

came into us, the glory came with Him. The Captain of salvation came into us to be the glory....Now...the Captain of salvation [is] leading us into glory, into the expression of God. Eventually, when our whole being has been permeated and saturated with the element of glory, the glory will come out of us. When we experience this glorification, we shall be fully in the expression of God. (*Conclusion* 320-321)

Joshua. Hebrews 4:8-9 indicates that Christ is the real Joshua, the One of whom Joshua was a type. In Joshua 1:2 the Lord spoke to Joshua, saying, "Now then arise and cross over this Jordan, you and all this people, into the land which I am giving to them, to the children of Israel." *Joshua* means "Jehovah the Savior" or "the salvation of Jehovah" (Num. 13:16); it is a Hebrew name of which *Jesus* is the equivalent in Greek. Joshua was thus a type of Christ bringing the people of God into the good land as the rest.

The Sabbath rest. As the real Joshua, Christ brings us into rest, which is actually Christ Himself as the good land. This rest—the remaining Sabbath rest—is strongly emphasized in Hebrews (3:11, 18; 4:1, 3, 5, 8, 10-11). If we would have the proper understanding of the Sabbath rest in Hebrews, we need to realize that, according to the principle of first mention (Gen. 2:2-3), a Sabbath denotes a situation in which God attains what He desires—man on earth expressing Him and representing Him (1:26-28; Heb. 2:6-8a). When the desire of God's heart is satisfied, He enjoys a Sabbath. In the Old Testament, the good land (Deut. 12:9) was a rest because there, with the temple, God could have His expression and His representation for His kingdom, government, and administration. The Sabbath rest in Hebrews 4:9 is Christ as our rest, typified by the good land of Canaan. Although Christ will be the Sabbath rest to the believers in three stages—in the church age, in the millennial kingdom, and in the new heaven and new earth—here it is sufficient to point out that, according to Hebrews, in this age the heavenly Christ, who expresses and represents God and who, resting from His work, sits at the right hand of God in the heavens, is the rest to us in our spirit. To have Christ as our Sabbath rest today means that we are experiencing and enjoying the Christ who expresses and represents God while we live in the church as the increase of Christ.

The replacement and reality of the Old Testament offerings and sacrifices. Hebrews 10:5-10 reveals that Christ, according to the will of God, is the replacement and reality of the sacrifices and offerings in the Old Testament, which are types of Himself as the unique sacrifice and offering:

Therefore, coming into the world, He says, "Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, but a body You have prepared for Me. In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You did not delight. Then I said, Behold, I have come (in the roll

of the book it is written concerning Me) to do Your will, O God." Saying above, "Sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You did not desire nor delight in" (which are offered according to the law), He then has said, "Behold, I have come to do Your will." He takes away the first that He may establish the second, by which will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

These verses indicate that the will of God was to take away the first—the animal sacrifices of the old covenant—so that the second—the sacrifice of Christ of the new testament—might be established. *The first* in verse 9 refers to the sacrifices of the first, or old, covenant, and *the second* refers to the sacrifice of the second, or new, covenant. The sacrifice of the new covenant is Christ.

Christ came into the world to do the will of God, and the will of God, in this context, was that Christ would put away the animal sacrifices of the old covenant and establish Himself as the unique sacrifice of the new covenant. God prepared a body for Christ in which He could offer Himself to God to replace all the offerings and sacrifices. This was God's will, and Christ came to do it. Because Christ did God's will, fulfilling God's desire, the offerings and sacrifices of the old covenant are no longer needed. They have been replaced by Christ, who, in His all-inclusiveness, is now everything to us.

All the sacrifices and offering required by the law were types of Christ. Through incarnation Christ came with a body of blood and flesh to replace those sacrifices and offerings with Himself as the unique sacrifice and offering. In the flesh and through the eternal Spirit (9:14), He offered Himself to God once for all to take away sins. This was the fulfillment of the will of God to take away the first and to establish the second, Christ as the reality of the offerings and sacrifices.

The One who shed His blood to enact the new covenant. The Christ who is the unique offering and sacrifice is the One who shed His blood to enact the new covenant. The new covenant required the shedding of the blood of the God-man, the blood of Jesus, the Son of God (1 John 1:7). "Without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" (Heb. 9:22), and without forgiveness of sins there is no way to fulfill the requirements of God's righteousness, holiness, and glory so that the new covenant could be enacted. The blood of Christ (God's blood, Acts 20:28) was shed for the forgiveness of sins, and with His blood, the blood of the eternal covenant (Heb. 13:20), the new and better covenant (10:29; 7:22; 8:6) has been enacted (Matt. 26:28).

Hebrews has much to say concerning the blood of Christ. Through His own blood, Christ entered once for all into

the Holy and Holies and obtained an eternal redemption for us (9:12). The blood of Christ sanctifies us (13:12; 10:29), purifies our conscience (9:14), and “speaks something better than that of Abel” (12:24), speaking of forgiveness, justification, reconciliation, and redemption. By this precious blood we have boldness for entering the Holy of Holies, where we may enjoy the all-inclusive Christ within the veil.

Mediator of a new and better covenant. Christ is the Mediator of the new covenant, which is a better covenant (9:15-16; 8:6; 12:24). By His death Christ consummated the new covenant. In His death He left the new covenant with us, and now in His resurrection He, as the Mediator of the new covenant, is executing all that has been accomplished and bequeathed to us in the new covenant, which, because of His death, has become a testament, a will. This better covenant was enacted upon better promises (8:6) and was consummated with Christ’s better sacrifices (9:23). Now in the new covenant we have the forgiveness of sins and the law of life, we have the capacity to know the Lord, and He is our God and we are His people (8:10-11). As the Mediator of this new and better covenant, the resurrected and ascended Christ is enforcing this covenant. Actually, what He is enforcing, or executing, today is not merely the new covenant but the new testament, a will that was enacted by His death and bequeathed to us through His resurrection. Every item of this will, this testament, is a bequest for us to receive, appropriate, experience, and enjoy by faith.

Surety of a better covenant. “Jesus has also become the surety of a better covenant” (7:22). As a note in the Recovery Version of the New Testament points out, the Greek word for *surety* is from a root word meaning “a hand into which something is placed as a pledge,” implying that the guarantee, the surety, cannot be unbound. Christ has pledged Himself to the new covenant and to all of us, His believers, who are under the new covenant, and He ensures the effectiveness of the new covenant. Because Christ is such a surety, the new covenant cannot fail. Everything in the new covenant will be fulfilled by Christ Himself.

Author and Perfector of faith. Hebrews 12:2 says, “Looking away unto Jesus, the Author and Perfector of our faith.” The word *Author* indicates that Christ is the source and cause of faith; He is the One who originates and inaugurates faith within us. This implies that faith is a gift, something infused into us by the Lord, not a natural

The heavenly Christ
is the rest to us
in our spirit.
To have Christ as
our Sabbath rest means
that we are experiencing
and enjoying the Christ
who expresses and
represents God while we live
in the church as
the increase of Christ.

capacity that we have in ourselves. Our faith has its source in the Lord and is actually Christ Himself dispensed into us to become in us our ability to believe in Him and to be one with Him. The word *Perfector* indicates that our faith needs to be developed and completed. As believers, we have all been allotted “equally precious faith” (2 Pet. 1:1). This faith, which has been authored by the Lord, needs to be developed, perfected, in us by Him. Therefore, we need to turn away from all distractions, behold the glorified God-man in the heavens, and allow Him to finish in us the work which He has begun.

The Heavenly Christ

This all-inclusive Christ is the heavenly Christ in the Epistle to the Hebrews. The heavenly Christ is the Christ who is now in heaven, the present Christ who is ministering on our behalf in the heavenly Holy of Holies and transmitting the wealth of His divine and human being as the glorified God-man into our regenerated spirit so that He, the Captain of our salvation, may bring us into the very glory in which He now dwells.

Pointing us to the Christ in heaven, the book of Hebrews reveals this wonderful Christ. After He made purification of sins, He “sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high” (1:3; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2). As 1:13 indicates, Christ’s sitting down on the right hand of God was a fulfillment of what was prophesied concerning Him in Psalm 110:1: “Sit at My right hand until I set Your enemies as a footstool for Your feet.” He entered into the heavens, “into heaven itself, to appear now before the face of God for us” (9:24). Furthermore, our Lord “has passed through the heavens” (4:14) and has become “higher than the heavens” (7:26), so that He is not only in heaven but is far above all (Eph. 4:10). Now as we are running “the race which is set before us” (Heb. 12:1), we should look away “unto Jesus,” the One who “sat down on the right hand of the throne of God” (v. 2). The Greek word translated “looking away unto” denotes looking with undivided attention by turning away from every other object. We need to turn away from the earthly, religious things and look away unto the “wonderful Jesus, who is enthroned in heaven and crowned with glory and honor,” the marvelous and glorious Son of God who is “the greatest attraction in the universe,” who is “like an immense magnet, drawing all His seekers to Him.” Only “by being attracted by His charming beauty” can we “look away from all things other than Him” (Recovery Version, 12:2, note 2).

Andrew Murray, who is surely exceptional in his personal knowledge and experience of the heavenly Christ, regards Hebrews as a glass in which “we can also see the glory of Jesus on the throne of heaven, in the power that can make our heart and life heavenly too” (*Holiest* 26-27). Our particular need, Murray continues, is to “see Him, to consider Him, to look to Him, *as He lives in heaven* (27). If we would be brought on to maturity and live an overcoming life for the fulfillment of God’s New Testament economy, we must follow the example of Andrew Murray in aspiring to know this heavenly Christ:

It is Jesus Christ we must know better. It is He who lives to-day in heaven, who can lead us into the heavenly sanctuary, and keep us there, who can give heaven into our heart and life. *The knowledge of Jesus in His heavenly glory and His saving power*; it is this our Churches and our Christians need. It is this the Epistle will bring us....It is the great object of the Epistle to bring home to us the *heavenly glory of Christ* as the ground of our confidence, the measure of our expectation, and the character of that inward salvation He imparts....Observe how the great truth we are to learn is this: the knowledge of Jesus as having entered heaven for us, and taken us in union with Himself into a heavenly life, is what will deliver the Christian from all that is low and feeble, and lift him to a life of joy and strength. To gaze upon the heavenly Christ in the Father’s presence, to whom all things are subject, will transform us into heavenly Christians, dwelling all the day in God’s presence, and overcoming every enemy. Yes, my Redeemer, *seated at God’s right hand*—if I only know Him aright and trust Him as able to save completely—He will make me more than conqueror. (27, 44, 65)

The heavenly Christ surely is worthy of our attention and of our ardent pursuit. J. G. Bellett’s writing is helpful, even inspiring:

When the Lord Jesus was here, as we learn in Matthew iii., the heavens were opened to get a sight of Him. There was an object worthy of the attention of the heavens. He returned—and the heavens had an object they had never known before—a glorified Man. And as in Matthew iii. we get the heavens opened to look down at Christ here, so in the Hebrews you get the heavens opened that you may look up at Christ there....Jesus is now in heaven in the glory of a Forerunner—a High Priest—the Purger of our sins. There He sits arrayed in glories. (4, 34)

The Heavenly Character of Hebrews

If we would appreciate the heavenly Christ in the book of Hebrews, we need to recognize the heavenly character of this book as whole. This heavenly character is indicated by the frequent use of the words *heaven* (9:24; 11:12; 12:25, 26), *heavens* (1:10; 4:14; 7:26; 8:1; 9:23; 12:23),

and *heavenly* (3:1; 6:4; 8:5; 9:23; 11:16; 12:22). In contrasting the old covenant, which is earthly, to the new covenant, which is heavenly, the book of Hebrews is focused on the heavenly nature of the positive things, unfolding the heavenly calling (3:1), the heavenly gift (6:4), the heavenly things (8:5), the heavenly country (11:16), and the heavenly Jerusalem (12:22). We are enrolled in the heavens (12:23), and God warns us today from the heavens (v. 25). If we heed God’s warning, we may realize the danger of being so earthly minded that we have no heavenly consciousness (cf. Col. 3:1-2), that is, no awareness of the person and ministry of the heavenly Christ, the heavenly nature of the church, of the heavenly provisions of the new testament, of the fact that, in Paul’s words, “our commonwealth exists in the heavens” (Phil. 3:20), or of our need, as pilgrims and sojourners, to seek the heavenly country and eventually to become part of the heavenly Jerusalem, the city whose Architect and Builder is God. Everything about this Epistle—its view, its emphasis, its speaking, its atmosphere—is heavenly. In a very real sense, Hebrews functions as the gate of heaven through which we may enter into the heavenly realm to experience and enjoy the Christ who is now in the heavens:

What is spoken of in this book is like the gate of heaven. Here we enjoy Christ as the heavenly One who joins us to heaven and brings heaven to us [in our spirit, 4:12] that we may be a heavenly people, living a heavenly life on earth and inheriting all the heavenly things. (Recovery Version, Heb. 1:14, note 1)

J. G. Bellett and Andrew Murray share this view. Bellett says, “This epistle introduces the inner heavens to you, and not in a physical, but in a moral character. It introduces us to the glories surrounding and attaching to the Lord Jesus, now accepted in the heavens” (3). He goes on to say, “One leading characteristic of this epistle is that it gives us a look into heaven as it now is” (10). It is a heavenly book with a heavenly perspective which encourages us to live in the presence of God in the heavenly sanctuary. Understanding this, Andrew Murray tells us that in Hebrews “the heavenly sanctuary has been opened to us, so that we may now come and take our place there, with Jesus in the very presence of God” (*Holiest* vi-vii).

Heaven—a Place and a State

At this juncture we need to raise a basic question: What is heaven? Is heaven a place or is heaven a state? The proper answer is both. Heaven is both a place, an actual transcendent realm, and also a spiritual state, or condition of life, in this realm.

Paul’s word in 2 Corinthians 12:2 indicates that there are three heavens. In this verse he speaks of being “caught

away to the third heaven” (which, as the context indicates differed from his experience of being “caught away into Paradise,” v. 4). There is wide agreement among Bible scholars that the first heaven is the atmospheric heaven (Deut. 11:11, 17; 28:12, 24; Psa. 18:13), that the second heaven is the celestial skies, or the universe (Gen. 1:14; 15:5; Exo. 20:4; Jer. 10:2; Heb. 1:10), and that the third heaven, to which Paul was caught away and which is the object of our interest here, is the abode of God, the place where God and the Lord Jesus are today (Psa. 33:13-14; Isa. 63:15; Matt. 5:16, 45; 6:1, 9; 7:11, 21; 18:10; Eph. 4:10; Heb. 4:14; 1:3).

Heaven is both a place
where the Lord Jesus is
today as the glorified man
and also a spiritual
condition, in which the
believers may now live as
they receive from the
ascended, transcendent
Lord the heavenly life
and power to live
a heavenly life on earth.

would seem that heaven is a state, a spiritual condition, rather than a place. On the other hand...Jesus presumably continues to have a glorified body...a factor which seems to require place. In addition, parallel references to heaven and earth suggest that, like earth, heaven must be a locale. The most familiar of these references is, “Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed by thy name. Thy kingdom come, They will be done, On earth as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:9-10). We must be mindful, however, that heaven is another realm, another dimension of reality. It is probably safest to say that while heaven is both a place and a state, it is primarily a state. (398)

“Heaven is more than a mystical notion, imaginary dream-land, or philosophical concept. It is a real and present place in which God, the Creator of all things, lives” (Ice 10). We may also say that heaven “denotes a spiritual sphere coexisting with the material world of space and time; it is where the exalted Christ now is, seated at God’s right hand” (Maile 382). Although heaven exists now and is “somewhere beyond earth and our universe,” “it is not limited by physical boundaries or boundaries of time and space” (Ice 11). The following remarks by John F. MacArthur are quite helpful:

To say that God dwells in heaven is not to say that He is contained there. But it is uniquely His home, His center of operations, His command post. It is the place where His throne resides. And it is where the most perfect worship of Him occurs. It is in that sense that we say heaven is His dwelling-place....God transcends heaven. Heaven, in the end, is a *place*—the place where God dwells...the heaven of heavens, the third heaven....It transcends the confines of time-space dimensions. Perhaps that is part of what Scripture means when it states that God inhabits eternity (Isa. 57:15). His dwelling place—heaven—is not subject to the normal limitations of finite dimensions. (56, 59, 60)

Millard J. Erickson points out that a disputed question regarding heaven is whether it is a place or a state. Having identified the issue, Erickson continues by presenting his views:

On the one hand, it should be noted that the primary feature of heaven is closeness and communion with God, and that God is pure spirit (John 4:24). Since God does not occupy space, which is a feature of our universe, it

This seems to be a fair and balanced assessment. Nevertheless, instead of trying to determine what heaven is primarily, it may be sufficient to assert that heaven is both a place and a state, or condition of life.

The book of Hebrews indicates that heaven is both a place where the Lord Jesus is today as the glorified man and also a state, or spiritual condition, in which the believers may now live as they receive from the ascended, transcendent Lord the heavenly life and power to live a heavenly life on earth. Murray says, “Heaven is not only a place, but a state, a mode of existence, the life in which the presence of God is revealed and experienced in its unhindered power” (*Holiest* 105). Elsewhere Murray says, “Heaven is not only a locality, with its limitations, but a state of life, that condition of spiritual existence in the full enjoyment of God’s love and fellowship, into which Christ entered” (320).

According to the revelation in Hebrews, we may experience heaven as a state, or condition, of life both by entering into this heavenly condition and by allowing this heavenly condition to enter into us. On the one hand, we are brought into heaven through our organic union with Christ (Eph. 2:6), who is our Forerunner, Captain, and High Priest. On the other hand, heaven as a condition of life is brought into us through the heavenly Christ as a “Minister of the holy places, even of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man” (Heb. 8:2). Our being in heaven and heaven’s being in us both depend upon Christ’s being the heavenly ladder, which joins earth to heaven and brings heaven to earth (Gen. 28:12, 16-19; John 1:51). In the church today—the house of God (Bethel) and the gate of heaven—Christ is a mysterious, heavenly ladder which connects our regenerated spirit to heaven. Ephesians 2:22 says that the dwelling place of

God is in spirit, that is, in the regenerated human spirit. Through Christ as the ladder which is joined to our spirit (1 Cor. 6:17), we can enter into heaven and heaven can enter into us. Simultaneously, we can be in heaven as a condition of life, and heaven as a condition of life can be in us:

Since today our spirit is the place of God's habitation, it is now the gate of heaven, where Christ is the ladder that joins us, the people on earth, to heaven, and brings heaven to us. Hence, whenever we turn to our spirit, we enter through the gate of heaven and touch the throne of grace [4:16] in heaven through Christ as the heavenly ladder. (Recovery Version, Heb. 4:16, note 1)

The Heavenly Ministry of Christ

The New Testament, as a full revelation of Christ, shows us that the ministry of Christ is of two parts: Christ's ministry on earth, His earthly ministry, and Christ's ministry in heaven, His heavenly ministry. Among a great many Christians the primary emphasis is placed on Christ's earthly ministry, that is, on the work accomplished by the Lord Jesus when He was on earth. Most believers have heard little, if anything, concerning the heavenly ministry of Christ, and may know virtually nothing about it. It is common for those in fundamental Christian circles to speak of the finished work of Christ and to appeal to the Lord's word in John 19:30—"It is finished!"—as proof that Christ completed the work which He came to do and that now, having nothing further to do, He is sitting on the throne in the heavens. Yes, in His earthly ministry, which culminated with His death on the cross, Christ completed the work of redemption, and the book of Hebrews places strong emphasis upon this fact, testifying that Christ has dealt with sin once for all (7:27; 9:12; 10:10). Christ has been "offered once to bear the sins of many" (9:28). "This One, having offered one sacrifice for sins, sat down forever on the right hand of God" (10:12), for "by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified" (v. 14). Hebrews rightly emphasizes the completed redemptive work of Christ, and this book is actually based upon the efficacy of the earthly ministry of Christ. Nevertheless, the same book unveils, in a marvelous and profound way, the present, heavenly ministry of Christ.

In His earthly ministry, Christ accomplished the work of redemption. However, although redemption is a procedure required by God, it is not the original goal ordained by God. God's goal is the fulfillment of the desire of His heart to produce and build up a corporate expression of Himself in Christ by dispensing Himself as the Triune God into His chosen and redeemed people. This corporate expression is the Body of Christ, which consummates in the New Jerusalem. Whereas the earthly ministry of

Christ was mainly for redemption, the heavenly ministry of Christ is for the fulfillment of God's original purpose. Therefore, having completed His redemptive work, the heavenly Christ, the God-man in glory, is now, for the fulfillment of God's original purpose, actively carrying out His heavenly ministry, especially in His office as a High Priest according to the order of Melchisedec.

A Kingly and Divine High Priest

The book of Hebrews is focused on the heavenly Christ, and the central point concerning this heavenly Christ is that He is a Priest not according to the order of Aaron but according to the order of Melchisedec (5:6, 10; 6:20; 7:11, 15, 17; 8:1), a kingly and divine High Priest. "The Epistle to the Hebrews tells us how Christ as man, having finished the sacrifice for us, went up to heaven and now has a heavenly priesthood....It is the heavenly priesthood of Christ we want to think of" (Murray, *Jesus Christ* 22-23).

If we would have the proper understanding of Christ's heavenly, kingly, and divine priesthood, it is crucial for us to realize that the basic significance of a priest in the Bible is not that a priest serves God but that a priest ministers God to human beings. This basic significance of a priest is seen in the first mention of a priest in the Scriptures, a mention which establishes the principle of a priest. The first time the word *priest* is used is with Melchisedec (Gen. 14:18-20). As we study this first mention of a priest, we see that the foundational story of the priesthood in the Bible is that of a priest coming from God and ministering something of God to God's people, especially to Abraham. The bread and wine offered to Abraham by Melchisedec signify God being ministered to us to nourish, refresh, sustain, comfort, and strengthen us. The concept is the same with the heavenly Christ as the High Priest according to Hebrews: He ministers God into us.

At this juncture we need to point out that Hebrews is a book on Christ's priesthood in three aspects (2:17; 5:6; 7:16, 25). The first aspect—the aspect of the Aaronic priesthood—is for offering sacrifices to God for our sins (10:12). The Aaronic priesthood, therefore, solves the problem of sin (7:27; 9:12, 28). In His earthly ministry, Christ, as typified by Aaron, put away sin by offering Himself to God as the one sacrifice for sins (9:26; 10:10-12). However, the Aaronic priesthood was not part of God's initial intention but was added later because of the problem of sin (1:3; John 1:29; Rom. 8:3). For the fulfillment of God's original purpose, the problem of sin had to be solved, and it has been solved by Christ in the Aaronic aspect of His priesthood.

The second aspect of Christ's priesthood—the aspect of the kingly priesthood—is for ministering God into us

(Heb. 5:10; 7:1-2). Whereas Christ's purifying of sins is typified by the work of Aaron, His sitting down on the right hand of the Majesty on high is according to the order of Melchisedec (Psa. 110:1, 4; Heb. 1:3; 8:1). As a High Priest according to the order of Melchisedec, Christ is the King of righteousness and the King of peace (Isa. 32:17; 9:6). Now as the kingly High Priest Christ ministers to us whatever we need, dispensing the processed and consummated Triune God into us as our supply to fulfill God's eternal purpose (Eph. 3:11; 1:9). Today Christ is no longer offering sacrifices for sin; rather, Christ is ministering the Triune God to us as our supply. In the past, in His earthly ministry, Christ offered sacrifices to God for our sins as typified by Aaron. Now, in His heavenly ministry, Christ is ministering the processed and consummated Triune God to us as our supply according to the order of Melchisedec.

The third aspect of the heavenly priesthood of Christ unveiled in Hebrews—the aspect of the divine priesthood—is for saving us to the uttermost. Hebrews 7:25 says, “He is able to save to the uttermost those who come forward to God through Him, since He lives always to intercede for them.” For Christ to be kingly is a matter of status, but for Christ to be divine is a matter of constituent, that is, of having the necessary element that constitutes Him a divine High Priest. This element is, of course, Christ's divinity. Christ's divinity constitutes Him a High Priest who is living, full of life, and able to continue His priesthood perpetually (vv. 17, 24). Christ is a perpetual High Priest “according to the power of an indestructible life” (v. 16).

Christ's divine priesthood is actually the saving power of His indestructible life. Therefore, Christ's divine priesthood is the presence of life and the absence of death. In His earthly ministry Christ destroyed “him who has the might of death, that is, the devil” (2:14) and also released “those who because of the fear of death through all their life were held in slavery” (v. 15). Now in His heavenly ministry Christ is saving us from all the effects, or by-products, of death so that, “much more we will be saved in His life” (Rom. 5:10) and “much more” we will “reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ” (v. 17). The “much more” mentioned by Paul in Romans 5 is worked out in us by Christ as the heavenly High Priest presented in Hebrews.

Hebrews 1 and 2 reveal that Christ is fully qualified to be our High Priest. He is the Son of God with the divine

Although redemption is a procedure required by God, it is not the original goal ordained by God. God's goal is to produce and build up a corporate expression of Himself in Christ by dispensing Himself as the Triune God into His chosen and redeemed people.

nature (1:8) and the Son of man with the human nature (2:6, 9). He was incarnated to be like us (vv. 14, 17), He was tempted, tried (v. 18), He suffered death (v. 9), He made propitiation for our sins (v. 17), He destroyed the devil (v. 14), He released us from the slavery of death (v. 15), He brought forth many brothers in resurrection to form the church (vv. 11-12), and He was crowned with glory and honor in His exaltation (v. 9). Now He is the Captain of our salvation (v. 10), giving help to us (v. 16).

This wonderful, qualified One is “a merciful and faithful High Priest” (v. 17). Christ is able to be a merci-

ful and faithful High Priest because He is both the Son of God with divinity and the Son of Man with humanity. His being merciful corresponds to His being a man, and His being faithful corresponds to His being God. His faithfulness in His divinity has been woven together with His mercy in His humanity to constitute Him a merciful and faithful High Priest, the “great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God” (Heb. 4:14).

Christ as our High Priest is great in His person, in His work, and in His attainment (Heb. 1:5, 8; 2:6; 1:3; 2:9-10, 14-15, 17; 3:5-6; 4:8-9; 6:20; 9:24). He was tempted in all respects like us, and now as our great High Priest He is in the heavens sympathizing with our weaknesses (4:15). Moreover, He bears us before God in the Holy of Holies (9:24). Once again, this is a fulfillment of a type. In the Old Testament the high priest typifies Christ as our High Priest. Whenever the high priest went into the presence of God in the Holy of Holies, he bore upon his shoulders and upon his breast the names of the children of Israel (Exo. 28:9-12, 15-30). As the One who is the reality of this type, or picture, Christ is our merciful, faithful, and great High Priest, and we are on His shoulders (His bearing strength) and on His heart (His love). This means that, at this present moment, the heavenly Christ is bearing all His believers before God in the Holy of Holies. As He is bearing us before the face of God (Heb. 9:24), He is ministering God into our being. Through His priesthood, He is bringing us into God and God into us, mingling us with God and incorporating us into Him so that we may become, through His heavenly ministry, the corporate expression of God for the satisfaction of His heart's desire.

Related to Christ's priesthood are other aspects of the person and work of Christ in His heavenly ministry.

The Minister of the True Tabernacle

As our High Priest Christ is a “Minister of the holy places, even of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man” (v. 2). The heavenly Christ is ministering in the tabernacle pitched by the Lord, not by man. This tabernacle, this sanctuary, is in the third heaven, in which is the heavenly Holy of Holies. From this sanctuary Christ ministers heaven to us as a condition of life so that we may have the heavenly life and power to be a heavenly people living a heavenly life on earth. “His whole priesthood has, as its one great characteristic, heavenliness. He communicates the purity, the power, the life of heaven to us. We live in heaven with Him; He lives with heaven in us” (Murray, *Holiest* 166).

Because the heavenly Holy of Holies, where Christ is ministering on our behalf, is connected to our regenerated spirit, what Christ ministers to us from the third heaven is transmitted into our spirit. For instance, from the third heaven Christ ministers Himself to us as our life supply, in the way of dispensing. This dispensing involves a transmission from the heavenly Christ in the heavenly Holy of Holies into our spirit. As the heavenly Minister in the third heaven, the Lord continually transmits to us whatever we need for the carrying out of God’s economy.

The One Enthroned for God’s Administration

Hebrews 12:2 says that Christ “has sat down on the right hand of the throne of God.” The word *throne* implies administration, government. As the heavenly Christ, the Lord Jesus is the One enthroned for God’s administration. The throne on which the heavenly Christ is sitting is the throne of the divine administration.

From the Scriptures we need to see a vision of the throne of God as the center of God’s administration (Rev. 4:2; 5:1; 6:16; 7:9; 8:3; 21:5; 1 Kings 22:19; Isa. 6:1; Ezek. 1:26; Dan. 7:9). In His ascension Christ has been enthroned to execute God’s administration, His governmental operation (Rev. 3:21; 22:1, 3; 5:6). This means that the Lamb, the Redeemer, the One slain for our sins, is now on the throne carrying out God’s administration over the entire universe for the accomplishment of God’s economy. If we study the book of Revelation in this light, we will see that as the One enthroned as the heavenly administrator in God’s universal government, Christ is the Ruler of the kings of the earth (Rev. 1:5) and also the Lion-Lamb, the overcoming Redeemer, who is worthy to open the scroll of God’s economy (5:1-12). As the Lion He is the Fighter against the enemy, Satan; as the Lamb He is the Redeemer for us. Because Christ has solved the problems of the rebellion of Satan and the fall of man, He, the Lion-Lamb, is worthy to open the scroll of God’s economy and its seven seals. He is, therefore, the Priest-King.

He is the Priest ministering for us, and He is the King administering for God.

The Great Shepherd of the Sheep

Hebrews 13:20 speaks of Christ as the Shepherd: “our Lord Jesus, the great Shepherd of the sheep.” The word *sheep* implies the flock, which is the church as God’s flock (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:2-3). In God’s economy there is “one flock, one Shepherd” (John 10:16). The one flock is the church, the Body of Christ, in its proper local expression; the one Shepherd is Christ, who is the good Shepherd (v. 11, 14), the Chief Shepherd (1 Pet. 5:4), and the great Shepherd. Psalm 23 reveals that our Shepherd, Christ, while extending to us His all-inclusive, tender care, is leading us onward stage by stage until we become part of the house of God—the divine and human corporate expression of the Triune God in Christ. This, in brief, is the heavenly Christ revealed in the Epistle to the Hebrews. Surely, we need to consider Him and reconsider what we think and say concerning Him and pay the price to obtain the excellency of the knowledge of Him. AFC

Works Cited

- Bellet, J. G. *The Opened Heavens: Musings on the Epistle to the Hebrews*. Addison: Bible Truth Publishers, 1983.
- Erickson, Millard J. *Introducing Christian Doctrine*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992.
- Ice, Thomas and Timothy Demy. *The Truth about Heaven and Eternity*. Eugene: Harvest House Publisher, 1997.
- Lee, Witness. *The Conclusion of the New Testament*. Anaheim: Living Stream Ministry, 1993.
- . *The Crucial Points of the Truth in Paul’s Epistles, Elders’ Training, Book 6*. Anaheim: Living Stream Ministry, 1994.
- . *Life-study of Exodus*. Anaheim: Living Stream Ministry, 1987.
- . *Life-study of Philippians*. Anaheim: Living Stream Ministry, 1990.
- MacArthur, John F. *The Glory of Heaven: The Truth About Heaven, Angels and Eternal Life*. Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1996.
- Maile, J. F. “Heaven, Heavenlies, Paradise.” Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, Daniel G. Reid, eds. *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993.
- Murray, Andrew. *The Holiest of All: An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*. Old Tappan: Fleming H. Revell, n.d.
- . *Jesus Christ—Prophet Priest*. Minneapolis: Dimension Books, 1967.