



CHRISTIAN EDUCATION: LESSON 133

Intercession of Christ – Though it is true that Jesus completed His work of redemption on earth, His perfect sacrifice, but His priestly ministry did not end, and continues in heaven (Hebrews 8:1-2). In the Old Testament, the priests did offer sacrifices to God for the people, but they also performed another priestly function, that being their intercession and prayers on behalf of the people before God.

Exodus 30:1-10 describes the golden altar of incense, which was placed in the Holy Place, in front of the curtain outside the Holy of Holies (v. 6). The priest would mix a blend of sweet spices, as prescribed by the Lord, to be used at the altar of incense (vv. 34-35). He would then light the altar every day and night, resulting in a perpetual cloud of smoke and sweet aroma ascending from the altar, which would then enter behind the veil and into the Holy of Holies (vv. 7-8). This beautifully symbolized the intercessory ministry of the priesthood, and also the prayers of the people, ascending up into the presence of God (v. 8; Luke 1:9-10). The Bible often represents incense as the prayers of the people of God (Psalm 141:2; Revelation 5:8; 8:3-4). This daily function of the priests symbolized the intercessory function of Christ.

Even the altar of incense needed to be cleansed once a year, where on the Day of Atonement the high priest would sprinkle it with the blood of the sacrifices (Exodus 30:10). This symbolized the fact that the prayers of the people, including the high priest's, needed to be purified in order to be acceptable before the Lord. Thus the intercessory work of Christ in heaven is based on and the continuation of His completed sacrificial work on earth. These are two aspects of the same priestly ministry of Christ.

This intercessory work of Christ isn't simply His continual presence before the Father, as High Priest, the representative and also reminder of His sacrifice on behalf of His people; but has a much greater import. The Greek word translated as intercession is "entygchano," which comes from the root word meaning to obtain, reach or get, and in the New Testament it has been translated as the act of appealing, requesting, petitioning or pleading, for a specific purpose or cause (Acts 25:24; Romans 11:2).

Praying for His people – During His earthly ministry Jesus interceded for His disciples, praying for them (Luke 22:32; John 17:9, 15). Furthermore, in His High Priestly prayer, Jesus also prayed for all those who through His Word would believe in Him in the future. This means that even in heaven Jesus is continuing to pray for all the elect who are yet to come to faith (John 17:20).

Defending His people – Christ's intercession is not merely His prayers for His people. The Bible describes Satan as the accuser of the brethren, who accuses and brings charges against believers day and night before God (Job 1:9-11; 2:4-5; Revelation 12:10). But on the other hand the Bible describes Jesus as our helper or advocate (parakletos). When we hear this word we initially associate it with the Holy Spirit, however in John 14:16 Jesus states that He is the first Helper. Thus Jesus represents us, undertakes our cause, and defends us before the Father against Satan, pointing to His perfect and complete work of redemption on our behalf (John 14:16; Romans 8:33-34; 1 John 2:1; 5:18).

Ministering to His people – As our merciful and compassionate High Priest, Jesus understands and has experienced our human condition, our weaknesses, trials and temptations, and so is able to minister to us so "we may receive mercy and find grace to help in times of need" and "is able to save [us] to the uttermost" (Hebrews 2:18; 4:15-16; 7:24-25).

Rendering our service acceptable – Given that we are not yet made perfect, all that we do in our Christian life – our worship, service, prayers, is lacking and stained with sin, and thus Christ sanctifies and renders them acceptable to God (1 Peter 2:4-5). Realizing that we have such a High Priest should encourage and motivate us, and stir in us greater love, adoration and service toward our Lord.