

CHRISTIANS A CHOSEN GENERATION, A ROYAL PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PECULIAR PEOPLE

by Jonathan Edwards

But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. (1 Peter 2:9)

The apostle in the preceding verses speaks of the great difference between Christians and unbelievers, on account of their diverse and opposite relations to Jesus Christ. The former have Christ for their foundation, they come to him as a living stone, a stone chosen of God, and precious; and they also as living stones are built up a spiritual house. The Christian church is the temple of God, and particular believers are the stones of which that temple is built. The stones of Solomon's temple, which were so curiously polished and well fitted for their places in that building, were a type of believers. And Christ is the foundation of this building, or the chief corner stone. On the contrary, to the latter, to unbelievers, Christ, instead of being a foundation on which they rest and depend, is a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense. Instead of being a foundation to support them and keep them from falling, he is an occasion of their stumbling and falling.

And again, to believers Christ is a precious stone: Unto you therefore which believe, he is precious. But to unbelievers he is a stone that is disallowed, and rejected, and set at nought. They set light by him, as by the stones of the street. They make no account of him, and they disallow him. When they come to build, they cast this stone away as being of no use, not fit for a foundation, and not fit for a place in their building. In the eighth verse the apostle tells the Christians to whom he writes, that those unbelievers who thus reject Christ, and to whom he is a stone of stumbling, and rock of offense, were appointed to this. And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient, whereunto also they were appointed. It was appointed that they should stumble at the word that Christ should be an occasion not of their salvation, but of their deeper damnation. And then in our text, he puts the Christians in mind how far otherwise God had dealt with them, than with those reprobates. They were a chosen generation. God had rejected the others in his eternal counsels, but themselves he had chosen from eternity. They were a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people.

As God distinguished the people of Israel of old from all other nations, so he distinguishes true Christians. It is probable the apostle had in his mind some expressions that are used in the Old Testament, concerning the people of Israel. Christians are said here to be a chosen generation, according to what was said of Israel of old. Deu. 10:15, Only the Lord thy God had a delight in thy fathers to love them, and he chose their seed after them, even you above all people, as it is this day. Christians are here said to be a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people, agreeable to what was said of old of Israel, Exo. 19:5, 6, Now, therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine. And ye shall be unto me a

kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel.

But there is something further said here of Christians than there of Israel. There, it is promised to Israel that if they obey, they shall be a kingdom of priests. But here, Christians are said to be a priesthood of kings, or a royal priesthood. They are a priesthood, and they are also kings.

I propose to insist distinctly upon the several propositions contained in the words of the text.

I. True Christians are a chosen generation. Two things are here implied.

First, that true Christians are chosen by God from the rest of the world, to be his.

Second, that God's people are of a peculiar descent and pedigree, different from all the world besides.

First, true Christians are chosen by God from the rest of the world.

God does not utterly cast off the world of mankind. Though they are fallen and corrupted, and there is a curse brought upon the world, yet God entertained a design of appropriating a certain number to himself. Indeed all men and all creatures are his, as well since as before the fall. Whether they are elected or not, they are his. God does not lose his right to them by the fall, neither does he lose his power to dispose of them: they are still in his hands. Neither does he lose his end in creating them. God has made all things for himself, even the wicked for the day of evil. It possibly was Satan's design, in endeavoring the fall of man, to cause that God should lose the creature that he had made, by getting him away from God into his own possession, and to frustrate God of his end in creating man. But this Satan has not obtained.

But yet in a sense the wicked may be said not to belong to God. God doth not own them He has rejected them and cast them away. They are not God's portion, they are Satan's portion. God has left them, and they are lost. When man fell, God left and cast off the bulk of mankind. But he was pleased, notwithstanding the universal fall, to choose out a number of them to be his, whom he would still appropriate to himself. Though the world is a fallen world, yet it was the will of God still to have a portion in it, and therefore he chose out some and set them apart for himself, Psa. 4:3, But know that the Lord hath set apart him that is godly for himself: the Lord will hear when I call unto him. God's portion is his people, and Jacob is the lot of his inheritance, Deu. 32:9. Those who are God's enemies, and to whom he is an enemy, are still his. But those who are his friends, his children, his jewels, that compose his treasure, are his in a very different manner. God has chosen the godly out of the rest of the world to be nearly related to him, to stand in the relation of children, to have a property in him, that they might not only be his people, but that he might be their God. He has chosen these to bestow himself upon them. He has chosen them from among others to be gracious to them, to show them his favor. He has chosen them to enjoy him, to see his

glory, and to dwell with him forever. He has chosen them as his treasure, as a man chooses out gems from a heap of stones, with this difference: the man finds gems very different from other stones, and therefore chooses, but God chooses them, and therefore they become gems, and very different from others, Mal. 3:17, And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them as a man spareth his own son that serveth him. Psa. 135:4, For the Lord hath chosen Jacob unto himself, and Israel for his peculiar treasure. God has chosen them for a most noble and excellent use, and therefore they are called vessels unto honor, and elect vessels. God has different uses for different men. Some are destined to a baser use, and are vessels unto dishonor. Others are chosen for the most noble use, for serving and glorifying God, and that God may show the glory of divine grace upon them.

Several things may here be observed concerning this election of God, whereby he chooses truly godly persons.

1. This election supposes that the persons chosen are found among others. The word election denotes this: it signifies a choosing out. The elect are favored by electing grace among the rest of mankind, with whom they are found mixed together as the tares and the wheat. They are found among them in the same sinfulness, and in the same misery, and are alike partakers of original corruption. They are among them in being destitute of anything in them that is good, in enmity against God, in being in bondage to Satan, in condemnation to eternal destruction, and in being without righteousness. So that there is no distinction between them prior to that which the election makes. There is no respect wherein the elect are not among the common multitude of mankind, 1 Cor. 4:7, For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now, if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory as if thou hadst not received it? 1 Cor. 6:11, And such were some of you; but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God. And therefore,

2. No foreseen excellency in the elected is the motive that influences God to choose them. Election is only from his good pleasure. God's election being the first thing that causes any distinction, there can be no distinction already existing, the foresight of which influences God to choose them. It is not the seeing of any amiability in them above others, that causes God to choose them rather than the rest. God does not choose men, because they are excellent, but he makes them excellent, and because he has chosen them. It is not because God considers them as holy that he chooses them, but he chooses them that they might be holy, Eph. 1:4, 5, According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy, and without blame before him in love; having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will. God does not choose them from the foresight of any respect they will have towards him more than others. God does not choose men and set his care upon them because they love him, for he has first loved us, 1 John 4:10, Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins; verse 19 (1 John. 4:19), We love him, because he first loved us.

It is not from any foresight of good works that men do before or after conversion. But on the contrary, men do good works because God has chosen them, John 15:16, Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain; that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you. Nor did God choose men, because he foresaw that they would believe and come to Christ. Faith is the consequence of election, and not the cause of it, Acts 13:48, And when the Gentiles heard this they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life, believe. It is because God has chosen men, that he calls them to Christ, and causes them to come to him. To suppose that election is from the foresight of faith, is to place calling before election, which is contrary to the order in which the Scripture represents things, Rom. 8:30, Moreover, whom he did predestinate, them he also called; and whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified. It is not from the foresight of any, either moral or natural qualifications, that God chooses men, nor because he sees that some men are of a more amiable make, and better natural temper or genius, nor because he foresees that some men will have better abilities, and will have more wisdom than others and so will be able to do more service for God than others, nor because he foresees that they will be great and rich and so possessed of greater advantages to serve him, 1 Cor. 1:27, 28, But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world, to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world, to confound the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world, and things despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are. Nor is it from any foresight of men's endeavors after conversion, because he sees that some whom he chooses will do much more than others to obtain heaven. But God chooses them, and therefore awakens them, and prompts them to strive for conversion. Rom. 9:16, So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy. Election in Scripture is everywhere referred to God's own good pleasure, Mat. 11:26, Even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight. 2 Tim. 1:9, Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.

3. True Christians are chosen of God from all eternity, not only before they were born, but before the world was created. They were foreknown of God, and chosen by him out of the world, Eph. 1:4, According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy, and without blame before him in love. 2 Tim. 1:9, According to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus, before the world began.

4. God in election set his love upon those whom he elected, Rom. 9:13, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated. Jer. 31:3, The Lord hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee. 1 John 4:19, We love him because he first loved us. A God of infinite goodness and benevolence loves those that have no excellency to move or attract it. The love of men is consequent upon some loveliness in the object, but the love of God is antecedent to, and the cause of it. Believers were from all eternity beloved both by the Father and the Son. The eternal love of the Father appears in that he from all eternity contrived a way for their salvation, and chose Jesus Christ to be their Redeemer, and laid help upon him. It is a fruit of this electing love that God sent his Son into the world to die, it was to redeem those

whom he so loved. 1 John 4:10, Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. It is a fruit of the eternal, electing love of Jesus Christ, that he was willing to come into the world, and die for sinners, and that he actually came and died, Gal. 2:20, I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless, I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. And so conversion, and glorification, and all that is done for a believer from the first to the last, is a fruit of electing love.

5. This electing love of God is singly of every particular person. Some deny a particular election, and say that there is no other election than a general determination, that all that believe and obey shall be saved. Some also own no more than an absolute election of nations. But God did from all eternity singly and distinctly choose, and set his love upon, every particular person that ever believes, as is evident by Gal. 2:20, Who loved me and gave himself for me. God set his love from eternity upon this and that person, as particularly as if there were no other chosen than he. Therefore it is represented as though they were mentioned by name, that their names are written in the book of life, Luke 10:20, Notwithstanding, in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven. Rev. 13:8, And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

6. In election, believers were from all eternity given to Jesus Christ. As believers were chosen from all eternity, so Christ was from eternity chosen and appointed to be their Redeemer, and he undertook the work of redeeming them. There was a covenant respecting it between the Father and Son. Christ, as we have already observed, loved them before the creation of the world. Then he had their names, as it were, written in a book, and therefore the book of life is called the Lamb's book, Rev. 21:27, And there shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life. And he bears their names upon his heart, as the high priest of old did the names of the tribes of the children of Israel on his breastplate. Christ often calls the elect those whom God had given him. John 17:2, As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him. In the 9th verse, I pray for them; I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine. In the 11th verse, And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are.

This part of the subject may suggest to us the following reflections.

(1.) God's thus electing a certain definite number from among fallen men from all eternity, is a manifestation of his glory. It shows the glory of the divine sovereignty. God hereby declares himself the absolute disposer of the creature. He shows us how far his sovereignty and dominion extend, in eternally choosing some and passing by others, and leaving them to perish. God here appears in a majesty that is unparalleled. Those who can see no glory of dominion in this act, have not attained to right apprehensions of God, and never have been made sensible of his glorious greatness. And here is especially shown the glory of divine

grace: in God's having chosen his people to blessedness and glory long before they are born, in his choosing them out of the mass of mankind from whom they were not distinguished, and in his love to them being prior to all that they have or do, being uninfluenced by any excellency of theirs, by the light of any labors or endeavors of theirs, or any respect of theirs towards him.

The doctrine of election shows that if those who are converted have earnestly sought grace and holiness, and in that way have obtained it, their obtaining it is not owing to their endeavors, but that it was the grace and mercy of God that caused them earnestly to seek conversion, that they might obtain it. It shows also that faith itself is the gift of God, and that the saints persevering in a way of holiness unto glory, is also the fruit of electing love. Believers love to God is the fruit of God's love to them, and the giving of Christ, the preaching of the gospel, and the appointing of ordinances, are all fruits of the grace of election. All the grace that is shown to any of mankind, either in this world, or in the world to come, is comprised in the electing love of God.

(2.) If believers are the chosen of God, here is a great argument for their love and gratitude towards him. The consideration of the miserable condition in which God found you, and in which he left others, should move your hearts. How wonderful that God should take such thought of a poor worm from all eternity! God might have left you as well as many others, but it pleased the Lord to set his love upon you. What cause have you for love and thankfulness, that God should make choice of you, and set you apart for himself, rather than so many thousands of others!

God has chosen you not merely to be his subjects and servants, but to be his children, to be his particular treasure. He has chosen you to be blessed forever in the enjoyment of himself, and to dwell with him in his glory. He has given you from all eternity to his Son, to be united unto him, to become the spouse of Christ. He has chosen you that you might be holy and without blame, that you might have your filth taken away, and that you might have the image of God put upon you, and that your soul might be adorned, to be the bride of his glorious and dear Son. What cause for love is here!

(3.) If believers are a chosen generation, let all labor earnestly to make their election sure. If true Christians are chosen of God, this should induce all earnestly to inquire whether they are true Christians. 2 Pet. 1:5-7, And besides this, giving all diligence, add to your faith, virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, charity.

Second, true Christians are a distinct race of men. They are of a peculiar descent or pedigree, different from the rest of the world. This is implied in their being called a generation. There are three significations of the word generation in the Scriptures. Sometimes it means, as is its meaning in the common use, a class of persons among a people, or in the world, that are born together, or so nearly together, that the time of their being in the different stages of the age of man is the same. They shall be young persons, middle aged, and old together. Or they shall be together upon the stage of action. All that

are together upon the face of the earth, or the stage of action, are very often accounted as one generation. Thus when God threatened that not one of the Israelites of that generation should see the good land, it is meant, all from twenty years old and upwards.

A second meaning is, those who are born of a common progenitor.

A third meaning of the word in Scripture, is, a certain race of mankind, whose generation and birth agree, not as to time, but as to descent and pedigree, or as to those persons from whom they originally proceeded. So it is to be understood, Mat. 1:1, This is the book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the son of Abraham; that is, this is the book that gives an account of his pedigree. And this meaning, viz. those who are of the same race and descent, must be given to the word in the text. The righteous are often spoken of in Scripture as being a distinct generation, Psa. 14:5, There were they in great fear: for God is in the generation of the righteous. Psa. 24:6, This is the generation of them that seek him, that seek thy face, O Jacob. Psa. 73:15, If I say, I will speak thus: behold, I should offend against the generation of thy children.

That the godly are a distinct race appears evident, since they are descended from God. They are a heavenly race, and they are derived from above. The heathen were wont to feign that their heroes and great men were descended from the gods, but God's people are descended from the true and living God, without any fiction, Psa. 22:30, A seed shall serve him; it shall be accounted to the Lord for a generation. That is, a seed, a posterity, shall serve him, and it shall be accounted to the Lord for his posterity or offspring.

Now the people of God may be considered as descending from God, and as being his posterity, either remotely or immediately.

1. They are remotely descended from God. The church is a distinct race that originally came from God. Other men are of the earth, they are of earthly derivation, they are the posterity of men, but the church is the posterity of God. Thus it is said, Gen. 6:2, That the sons of God saw the daughters of men, that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose. The sons of God were the children of the church, of the posterity of Seth. The daughters of men were those that were born out of the church, and of the posterity of Cain, and those that adhered to him.

It was God that set up the church in the world, and those who were the first founders of the church were of God, and were called specially the sons of God. Seth was the seed that God appointed, Gen. 4:25, And Adam knew his wife again; and she bare a son, and called his name Seth. For God, said she, hath appointed me another seed instead of Abel, whom Cain slew. Adam, in Luke's genealogy of Christ (Luke 3:38, Which was the son of Enos, which was the son of Seth, which was the son of Adam, which was the son of God,) is called the son of God, possibly, not only because he was immediately created by God, but also because he was from God, and was begotten by him. As he was a good man, and was the founder of the church of which Christ himself became a son. He was the first in line of the church, and as such he was from God. When the church was almost extinct God called Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldees, and afterwards out of Haran. Abraham was one immediately from God,

and all God's people in all succeeding ages are accounted as the children of Abraham. God promised Abraham that his seed should be as the stars of heaven, and as the sand on the seashore, meaning primarily not his posterity according to the flesh. John the Baptist said, God is able of the stones to raise up children unto Abraham. Those are the seed of Abraham, as we are taught in the New Testament, that are of the faith of Abraham. Christians, as well as Jews, are the seed of Abraham, Gal. 3:29, And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. So the church is the seed of Jacob, who is called God's son, Hos. 11:1, When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt. All God's people are called Israel, not only his posterity according to the flesh, but proselytes of old, and Gentile Christians now under the gospel. The sincerely godly, and they only, are the true Israel.

So the people of God are descended from God the Father originally, as they are descended from Christ the Son of God. Christians are called the seed of Christ, Gal. 3:29, And if ye be Christ's, etc. They are, as it were, his posterity. Christ calls them his children, Heb. 2:13, Behold I and the children which thou hast given me. So that if we trace the pedigree of God's people up to their original, they will be found to be descended from God: they are of heaven, they are not of this world. Other men are of the earth, and are earthly, but these are heavenly, and are of heaven. The wicked are called the men of this world, Psa. 17:14, From men which are thy hand, O Lord, from men of the world which have their portion in this life, and whose belly thou fillest with thy hid treasure: they are full of children, and leave the rest of their substance to their babes. The first beginnings of the church were from God, the great founder of the church. Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and those men, who under him have been founders, were of God, were of him. God chose them, called them, and created them for this purpose. Since which, God's people are descended one from another; the church is continued and propagated, as it were, by generation. If there were no ordinary and stated means made use of for the continuing and propagating the church, it would not be so. But God's people are made the instruments of one another's conversion, by begetting one another's souls. The church is continued by itself instrumentally through all generations, the people of God are begotten through the education, instruction, and endeavors of those who were God's people before. Therefore the church is represented in Scripture as being the mother of its members, Gal. 4:26, But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all. Believers are the children of the church, as they are often called, Isa. 49:20, The children which thou shalt have, after thou hast lost the other, shalt say again in thine ears, the place is too strait for me; give place to me, that I may dwell. Isa. 54:1, Sing, O barren, thou that didst not bear; break forth into singing, and cry aloud, thou that didst not travail with child: for more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife, saith the Lord. And many other places.

God's people are often, through their education and instruction, the spiritual parents of those of whom they are the natural parents. The ministers of the Word and ordinances are spiritual fathers. The apostle tells the Christian Corinthians, that he had begotten them through the gospel.

2. God's people are immediately begotten of God. When they become saints, they are born again, and they have a new nature given them. They have a new life begun, and they are

renewed in the whole man by a new generation and birth wherein they are born of God, John 1:12, 13, But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. They are born of the Spirit of God, John 3:8, The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh nor whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit. God is said to have formed the church from the womb, Isa. 44:2, Thus saith the Lord that made thee, and formed thee from the womb, which will help thee: Fear not, O Jacob my servant; and thou, Jeshurun, whom I have chosen.

This truth also may suggest to us a few profitable reflections.

(1.) Christians ought to bear with one another. It appears from what has been said that they are all of one kindred, that they have a relation to other Christians which they have not to the rest of the world, being of a distinct race from them, but of the same race one with another. They are descended all along from the same progenitors; they are the children of the same universal church of God; they are all the children of Abraham; they are the seed of Jesus Christ; they are the offspring of God. And they are yet much more alike, than their being of the same race originally argues them to be: they are also immediately the children of the same Father. God hath begotten all by the same Word and Spirit. They are all of one family, and should therefore love as brethren, 1 Pet. 3:8, Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another; love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous.

It is very unbecoming those who are God's offspring, to entertain a spirit of hatred and ill will one towards another. It is very unbecoming to be backward in helping and assisting one another, and supplying each other's wants, much more, to contrive and seek one another's hurt, to be revengeful one towards another.

(2.) Let Christians take heed so to walk that they may not dishonor their pedigree. You are of a very honorable race, more honorable by far than if you were the offspring of kings, and had royal blood in your veins. You are a heavenly offspring, the seed of Jesus Christ, the children of God. They that are of noble race are wont to value themselves highly upon the honor of their families, to dwell on their titles, their coats of arms, and their ensigns of honor, and to recount the exploits of their illustrious forefathers. How much more careful should you be of the honor of your descent: that you in nothing behave yourself unworthy of the great God, the eternal and omnipotent King of heaven and earth, whose offspring you are!

There are many things that are very base, and too mean for such as you. Such are a giving way to earthly-mindedness, a groveling like moles in the earth, a suffering your soul to cleave to those earthly things which ought to be neglected and despised by those who are of heavenly descent, an indulgence of the lusts of the flesh, suffering the soul to be immersed in filth, being taken up with mean and unworthy delights common to the beasts, being intemperate in the gratification of any carnal appetite whatsoever, or a being much concerned about earthly honor. It is surely a disgrace to them, who are accounted to God for a generation, much to care whether they are accounted great upon this dunghill. So it is

unworthy of your noble descent to be governed by your passions: you should be guided by higher principles of reason and virtue, and an universal respect to the glory and honor of God.

But Christians should seek after those things which will be to the honor of their birth, after spiritual wisdom, and knowledge of the most worthy and noble truths. They should seek more and more an acquaintance with God, and to be assimilated to him, their great progenitor, and their immediate Father, that they may have the image of his excellent and divine perfections. They should endeavor to act like God, wherein they are capable of imitation of him. They should seek heavenly-mindedness: those noble appetites after heavenly and spiritual enjoyments, a noble ambition after heavenly glory, a contempt of the trifles and mean things of this world. They should seek after those delights and satisfactions that can be enjoyed by none but heavenly minds. They should exercise a spirit of true, universal, and disinterested love and confidence, and Christian charity. They should be much in devotion, and divine contemplation.

(3.) We see here a reason why Christians are of so different a nature and temper from the rest of the world. The truly godly are very different in their disposition from others. They hate those things that the rest of the world love, and love those things for which the rest of the world have no relish, insomuch that others are ready to wonder that they should place any happiness in a strict observance of the self-denying duties of religion. They wonder what delight they can take in spending so much time in meditation and prayer, and that they do not place happiness in those things which themselves do, 1 Pet. 4:4, Wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot; speaking evil of you. But the reason is, they are of a different race, and so derive different dispositions.

It is ordinary to see those who are of different families, of a different temper. The natural temper of parents is commonly in some degree transmitted to their posterity. Indeed, all agree in many things, for all are of the same blood originally. All are descended from the same Adam, and the same Noah. But Christians are born again of another stock, different from all the rest of the world. Therefore they are of a temper by themselves, wherein none of the rest of the world agree with them, Rev. 1:6, And hath made us kings and priests unto God, and his Father: to him be glory and dominion, for ever and ever.

II. True Christians are a royal priesthood.

The two offices of king and priest were accounted very honorable both among Jews and heathens. But it was a thing not known under the law of Moses, that the same person should sustain both these offices in a stated manner. While Moses himself is said to have been king in Jeshurun, yet his brother Aaron was the high priest. Those who were kings by divine appointment in Israel were of another tribe from the priesthood, viz. the tribe of Judah. Before the giving the law we have an instance of one who was both king and priest, viz. Melchizedek, Gen. 14:18, And Melchizedek, king of Salem, brought forth bread and wine; and he was the priest of the most high God.

Therefore, in some of the prophecies of Christ, it is spoken of as a remarkable thing of him, that he should be a priest after the order of Melchizedek, Psa. 110:4, The Lord hath sworn and will not repent; thou art a priest for ever, after the order of Melchizedek. The same again is prophesied of as a wonderful thing by Zechariah, that he should be a priest upon a throne, Zec. 6:13, Even he shall build the temple of the Lord; and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne; and he shall be a priest upon his throne; and the counsel of peace shall be between them both. In this respect the gospel dispensation differs from the legal, that it reveals the compatibility of the two offices. One person, Jesus Christ, is antitype of both kings and priests, under the law. As it is the will of Christ, who became in all things like unto us, that his disciples should in many things become like unto him, so it is in this among others. As Christ is the Son of God, so those that are Christ's are the children of God. As Christ is the heir of God, so as Christ liveth, it is his will that they should live also. As Christ rose from the dead, so it is the will of Christ that his saints should rise also. As Christ is in heaven in glory, so it is the will of Christ that they should be with him where he is. So as Christ is both King and Priest, so shall believers be made kings and priests. What is said in the text is either with respect to what they now are, or what they shall be hereafter. The apostle says, ye are a royal priesthood; that is, ye have those honors in reversion. Christians are kings here, as a king who is in his minority, who though the crown is his right, has not yet come actually to reign. They are indeed in an exalted state while here, but not as they will be hereafter. Christians while here are indeed priests, but not as they will be. Christians are called kings and priests here, in this world, Rev. 1:6, And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father. But in Rev. 5 the saints in heaven speak of this as the consequence of their glory and exaltation, Rev. 5:9, 10, And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof; for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and hast made us unto our God kings and priests; that we should reign on the earth.

First, Christians are kings.

When Christians are called kings, the Scriptures include both what they actually have in this world, and what they have in a future state. The reward which our Lord Jesus promised to his disciples was a kingdom, Luke 22:29, And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me. Christians, having this promise, are therefore heirs of a kingdom here, which they are hereafter to receive, Jam. 2:5, Hearken, my beloved brethren; hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?

The reward of the saints is represented as a kingdom, because the possession of a kingdom is the height of human advancement in this world, and as it is the common opinion that those who have a kingdom have the greatest possible happiness. The happiness of a kingdom, or royal state, for which it is so much admired by mankind, consists in these things:

1. The honor of a kingdom.

2. The possessions of kings.

3. The government or authority of kings.

Now with respect to each of these, the happiness of the saints is far greater than that of the kings and greatest potentates in the world.

1. True Christians will be advanced to honors far above those of earthly kings. They will have a vastly higher dignity than any princes. If these are nobly descended, it is not so great an honor as to be the sons of God. If they are nobly educated, and have their minds formed for government, and have princely qualifications, these qualifications are not so honorable as those with which God endows his saints, whose minds he fills with divine knowledge, and gives them true and perfect holiness. Princes appear honorable from their outward enjoyment of honor and dignity, their royal robes, their stately palaces, and their splendid equipage. But these are not so honorable as those white robes, those inherent ornaments, with which the saints shall appear in heaven, with which they shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. What is a king's palace to those mansions in heaven, that Christ prepares for his saints? The honor of the creature consists in likeness and nearness to the Creator in heaven. The saints shall be like him, for they shall see him as he is. They shall be most near to him, and shall be admitted to a most intimate fellowship.

2. The saints shall have greater and more extensive possessions than any earthly monarch. One reason for which the state of kings is admired is their wealth. They have the most precious things laid up in their treasures. We read of the peculiar treasure of kings, Ecc. 2:8, I gathered me also silver and gold, and the peculiar treasure of kings and of the provinces: I gat me men singers and women singers, and the delights of the sons of men, as musical instruments, and that of all sorts; that is, the peculiar treasure of other kings. David conquered and subdued many kings, and spoiled their peculiar treasure, which fell to his son Solomon.

But the precious treasures of kings are not to be compared to those precious things which Christ will give his saints in another world: the gold tried in the fire that Christ has purchased with his own blood, those precious jewels, those graces and joys of his Spirit, and that beauty of mind with which he will endow them. King's possessions are very extensive, especially were they thus when kings were generally absolute, and their whole dominions, their subjects and their fortunes, were looked upon as their possessions. But these fall short of the extensive possessions of the saints, who possess all things. They are the heirs of God, and all that is God's is theirs so far as it can contribute to their happiness, Rev. 21:7, He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son. 1 Cor. 3:21, 22, Therefore let no man glory in men, for all things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours.

3. The saints shall also be advanced to the authority of kings. Christ has appointed to them a kingdom, and in that kingdom they shall reign. It is promised concerning the saints, that they shall reign, Rev. 5:10, And hath made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall

reign on the earth. Rev. 22:5, And there shall be no night there: and they need no candle, neither light of the sun, for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever. It is evident that they shall have a kingdom with respect to rule and government, as appears, Rev. 2:26, 27, And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over all nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father. But we must see that we rightly understand this. They shall not be appointed by God as sovereigns of the world, without any superior to direct them. Neither shall they be properly deputies or viceroys, as king Agrippa and some other kings were the deputies of the Roman emperors. But they shall reign in fellowship with Christ as joint heirs. They shall reign in the same kingdom with him, and shall have the happiness of having things done according to their will as much as if their own wills were paramount. Christ wills their will. All things will be disposed in the best manner for them, and to promote their happiness. To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne; even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.

The reigning of the saints will consist partly in judging. For the saints shall judge the world, angels and men with Christ, Mat. 19:28, And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit on the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. 1 Cor. 6:2, 3, Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? And if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Know ye not that we shall judge angels? how much more things that pertain to this life! How earnestly do men seek a kingdom! What fatigues, what dangers, what bloodshed, will they not encounter! In seeking conversion, you seek a kingdom. You who are poor, you who are children, have opportunity to obtain a kingdom, to advance yourselves to higher dignity, to more substantial honors, to greater possessions, to more precious treasures, to be clothed in robes of richer splendor, and to fill a loftier throne, than those enjoyed by the greatest earthly monarchs. It is a crown that you are to run for, an incorruptible crown, to be given you by the Great King of heaven, and to be worn by you as long as his throne shall endure. What encouragement is here afforded to the saints under afflictions and reproaches. What are they, to the worth and honor of a heavenly kingdom? When you shall have a crown of glory placed on your head, and be seated on Christ's throne, and shine forth as the light, and are seated at his royal banquet, then you will suffer no more forever. All trouble, all reproach, shall be driven away; you will be too high to be reached by the malice of men and devils, and shall soon forget all your sorrows.

Second, true Christians are priests of God. The priesthood under the law was a very honorable and sacred office, Heb. 5:4, And no man taketh this honor unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron. It was on account of this honor that those proud men, Korah and his company, envied Aaron; and God asserted and vindicated Aaron's right to it, by causing his rod to bud.

It was an honor which, before the giving of the law, when every particular family was wont to offer sacrifices for themselves, the firstborn used to claim, and therefore the birthright was so much esteemed and valued. Therefore Jacob had such a desire of having the

birthright of his brother Esau, and Esau's despising of it is spoken of as a great instance of his profaneness. A priest is said to be a chief man among his people, Lev. 21:4, But he shall not defile himself, being a chief man among his people, to profane himself. Because the office of the priesthood was so honorable, it is noticed as a wicked contempt of it in several wicked kings, that they made of the meanest of the people priests. The office was so honorable, that a king, Uzziah, coveted the honor of it, and it is mentioned as an instance of his pride that he did so, 2 Chr. 26:16, But when he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction: for he transgressed against the Lord his God, and went into the temple of the Lord to burn incense upon the altar of incense. And it was a very sacred office, and that above all other offices. Therefore those things were forbidden the priest that were lawful for all others, such as to be defiled for the dead, or to take to wife one that is put away from her husband, and the reason is given, Lev. 21:6, They shall be holy unto their God, and not profane the name of their God, for the offerings of the Lord made by fire, and the bread of their God, they do offer; therefore they shall be holy. They shall not take a wife that is a whore, or profane, neither shall they take a woman put away from her husband; for he is holy unto his God. Thou shalt sanctify him therefore, for he offereth the bread of thy God, he shall be holy unto thee: for I, the Lord, which sanctify you, am holy.

Jesus Christ is the only proper priest that is to offer sacrifices, and make atonement for sin, under the New Testament. He was the priest of whom all the priests of old were typical. But yet all believers are herein in a measure conformed to their head, and assimilated to him. The priesthood now is no longer confined to one family, to Aaron and his sons, but all the true Israel are priests. Every true Christian has a work and office that is as sacred as that of the priests was under the law, and everyone is advanced to a like honor, and indeed to a greater. But how every true Christian is a priest of God will appear in the following things.

1. Every true Christian is allowed as near an access to God, and as free a use of the sacred things, as the priests were of old. God under the law dwelt in the tabernacle and temple, that were the symbol of his presence, and those places were holy. The seed of Aaron might go into the holy place to minister before the Lord, but if any other came nigh, he was to be put to death, Num. 3:10, And thou shalt appoint Aaron and his sons, and they shall wait on their priest's office: and the stranger that cometh nigh, shall be put to death.

But now all are allowed to come nigh, we are all allowed a free access to God, to come with boldness and confidence. God's people are not kept at such a distance now as they were under the law. The church then was in its minority, and the heir, while a child, differs nothing from a servant. The servant is not allowed the free access of a child, he is kept more at a distance with fear and dread. Agreeably to the nature of that dispensation, there were not those special discoveries of the grace and love of God that are now made, and which invite rather than forbid near access.

When God was wont to appear to the children of Israel, it was more with terror and manifestations of awful majesty, and not so much with the discoveries of grace as now. When God appeared on mount Sinai, it was in flaming fire, and with thunder, and lightning, and earthquakes. But in how different a manner did he appear, when he appeared in the person of Christ, with mildness, and gentleness, and love! There is much the same

difference between us and them with respect of the liberty of access to God, as there was between the liberty of access of the children of Israel at mount Sinai, and the liberty which Christ's disciples had of approach to him when he was upon earth. At mount Sinai, only Moses and Aaron, and Nadab and Abihu, were allowed to come up into the mount, and none but Moses was to approach nigh, Exo. 24:1, And he said unto Moses, Come up unto the Lord, thou and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel; and worship ye afar off. But if any other presumed to touch the mount, God would break forth upon him. But Christ's disciples used daily to converse with him, as an intimate friend, Heb. 12:18, For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest. Yea, Christians are now allowed as near an approach unto God, as the high priest himself, who was allowed a much nearer approach than any of the other priests. God's dwelling place was the temple, but more especially was it in the holy of holies, in the mercy seat between the cherubim. There was a veil which separated that part of the temple from the rest, and no one might ever enter that veil but the high priest, and that but once a year, not oftener, upon pain of death, Lev. 16:2, And the Lord said unto Moses, Speak unto Aaron thy brother, that he come not at all times into the holy place, within the veil before the mercy-seat, which is upon the ark, that he die not: for I will appear in the cloud upon the mercy-seat. The way into the holiest of all was not as yet made manifest, but now it is, Heb. 9:7, 8, But into the second went the high priest alone once every year, not without blood, which he offered for himself, and for the errors of the people. The Holy Ghost thus signifying that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest, while as yet the first tabernacle was standing.

But now we are all allowed as near an access to God as the high priest only was under the law, and with more freedom, for he might approach but once a year. But Christians may approach boldly at all times through the blood of Christ, without any danger of dying, Heb. 4:16, Let us, therefore, come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need. The throne of grace and the mercy seat are the same thing. Having, therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; and having a high priest over the house of God; let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. That access into the holiest of all was allowed to all under the gospel, and at any time. It is signified by the rending of the veil, upon the death of Christ, for then was that blood shed by which we have access, Mat. 27:50, 51, Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost. And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent.

But especially will the access of saints in another world be much more near and familiar than that of the high priest. They shall not only enter into the holy of holies, but shall dwell with God in it, for heaven is the holiest of all. They shall then dwell in God's presence, they shall see his face, which no man can see and live.

In this world, though there is greater liberty of access than there was of old, yet still Christians are kept at a great distance from God in comparison of what they will be in

heaven, where they shall be admitted even to higher privileges than Moses in the mount, when he besought God to show him his glory. They shall then see with open face, and shall know as they are known.

2. Christians are a priesthood with respect to their offerings to God. The principal part of the work of the priests of old was to offer sacrifice, and to burn incense. As the priests of old offered sacrifice, so the work of Christians is to offer up spiritual sacrifices to God, 1 Pet. 2:5, Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. And here,

(1.) Christians offer up their own hearts to God in sacrifice: they dedicate themselves to God, Rom. 6:13, Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God. The Christian gives himself to God freely as of mere choice. He does it heartily; he desires to be God's, and to belong to no other. He gives all the faculties of his soul to God. He gives God his heart, and it is offered to God as a sacrifice in two ways.

Of these, the first is when the heart is broken for sin. A sacrifice, before it can be offered, must be wounded and slain. The heart of a true Christian is first wounded by a sense of sin, of the great evil and danger of it, and is slain with godly sorrow and true repentance. When the heart truly repents, it dies unto sin. Repentance is compared unto a death in the Word of God. Rom. 6:6-8, Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin. Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Gal. 2:20, I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. As Christ, when he was offered, was offered broken upon the cross. So there is some likeness to this, when a soul is converted: the heart is offered to God's slain and broken, Psa. 51:17, The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.

The second way is when a Christian offers his heart to God, flaming with love. The sacrifice of old was not only to be slain, but to be burnt upon the altar. It was to ascend in flame and smoke, and so to be a sweet savor to God.

That fire upon the altar was a type of two things: it was a type of the fire of the wrath of God, and it was also a type of the fire of the Spirit of God, or of divine love. The Holy Ghost is often compared to fire. With respect to the former, Christ alone is the sacrifice offered in the flame of God's wrath. But with regard to the latter, the hearts of the children of men are offered in the flame of divine love, and ascend up to God in that flame. This divine love is fire from heaven, as the fire upon the altar of old was. When a soul is drawn to God in true conversion, fire comes down from God out of heaven, in which the heart is offered in sacrifice, and the soul is baptized with the Holy Ghost and with fire.

In many of the sacrifices that were offered, only the fat about the inwards was burnt upon the altar, which fat of the inwards thus rising in flame, represented the offering of the soul. It is that which God looks at. It is that which must be offered in sacrifice to God. Especially hereafter, when the saints will be made priests in a more glorious manner than at present, will they offer up their hearts wholly to God in the flame of love. They shall, as it were, all be transformed into love, as burning oil is transformed into flame, and so, in that flame, shall they ascend up to God. Their souls will be as the angels, who are as a flame of fire not only for activity in God's service, but for love too. They shall be a flame ever burning, which shall burn longer than the fire upon the altar in Israel, that never went out, from the time that fire came down out of heaven in the wilderness, till the carrying away into Babylon.

(2.) This spiritual priesthood offers to God the sacrifice of praise. Many of their sacrifices under the law were sacrifices of peace offerings, which were mostly for thanksgiving and praise. But the spiritual sacrifice of the hearty and sincere praises of a saint, are more acceptable to God than all the bulls, and rams, and he-goats that they offered. The heartfelt praises of one true Christian are of more account with God than all those two and twenty thousand oxen, and a hundred and twenty thousand sheep, which Solomon offered to God at the dedication of the temple, as a sacrifice of peace offerings. Praise is called a sacrifice, Heb. 13:15, By him, therefore, let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to his name. Psa. 50:13, 14, Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats? Offer unto God thanksgiving, and pay thy vows unto the Most High; verse 23 Whoso offereth praise, glorifieth me; and to him that ordereth his conversation aright, will I show the salvation of God; Psa. 69:30, 31, I will praise the name of God with a song, and will magnify him with thanksgiving. This also shall please the Lord better than an ox or bullock that hath horns and hoofs. Praises are therefore in Hosea called calves of our lips, because they are like calves offered in sacrifice, Hos. 14:2, Take with you words, and turn to the Lord: say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously; so will we render the calves of our lips. Only true Christians offer those sacrifices. However hypocrites pretend to praise God, and to offer thanksgiving to him. Yet they, being insincere, offer not sacrifices with which God is well pleased. They offer not spiritual sacrifices, and therefore they are not of the spiritual priesthood. In heaven especially are the saints a holy priesthood upon this account, whose work it is forever to offer these sacrifices to God, who cease not day nor night to praise God and sing forth their ardent joyful hallelujahs. They sing a new song, a song that never will end, and never will grow old.

(3.) The next sacrifice which is offered by this spiritual priesthood, is obedience, sincere obedience. The sacrifices under the law did not only represent Christ's satisfying for sin by suffering, but they also represented Christ's obeying in suffering. For the sacrifices under the law were not only for propitiation, but they were for purchasing benefits, and so typified not only the satisfaction, but merit, which was by obedience, Psa. 40:6-8, Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire: mine ears hast thou opened; burnt-offering and sin-offering hast thou not required. Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God; yea, thy law is within my heart. And though the obedience of saints has no merit, yet it is pleasing and acceptable to God. It is as a sweet-smelling savor, and is compared to sacrifices, and preferred before them, 1 Sam 15:22, And Samuel said, Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt-offerings and sacrifices as

in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. Christians, by offering obedience to God in their lives and conversation, do what the apostle calls offering their bodies to be a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, as their reasonable service (Rom. 12:1). They offer their bodies, that is they dedicate their bodies to holy uses and purposes. They yield their members as instruments of righteousness unto holiness. The soul, while here, acts externally by the body. And in this Christians serve God. They yield their eyes, their ears, their tongues, their hands, and feet, as servants to God, to be obedient to the dictates of his Word, and of his Holy Spirit in the soul.

(4.) Another sacrifice which we shall mention as offered by this spiritual priesthood is charity, or expressions of Christian love in gifts to others. If the gift flows from a spirit of Christian love although it be but a cup of cold water, it is an acceptable sacrifice to God. And indeed whatsoever is given for a pious use, if it be to promote religion, and uphold the public worship of God, or to benefit a particular person, if it be done from a good spirit, it is a Christian sacrifice, Heb. 13:16, But to do good, and to communicate, forget not; for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.

But sacrifices of this kind may principally be ranked under two heads, of which the first is:

Liberality to ministers of the gospel. The priests of old lived upon the sacrifices that were offered to God, and what is now offered to ministers for their comfortable and honorable support Christ looks upon as offered to himself. He that receiveth you, receiveth me. Mat. 10:40. Thus Paul says of those things that were sent him by his hearers, that it was a sacrifice acceptable and well pleasing to God, Phil. 4:14, etc. Notwithstanding ye have well done that ye did communicate with my affliction. Now, ye Philippians, know also, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only. For even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my necessity. Not because I desire a gift: but I desire fruit that may abound to your account. But I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odor of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well pleasing to God.

The second is bounty to the poor. Christ accepts what is done to them as being done to himself, Mat. 25:40, And the King shall answer, and say unto them, Verity I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me. This God prefers before the legal sacrifices. Hos. 6:6, I desire mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt-offerings.

(5.) Another offering of this priesthood to God is the prayer of faith. Though this is rather compared to incense in Scripture than to a sacrifice, yet it is equally an evidence of their priesthood. Incense was that sweet confection which we read of, Exo. 30:34, And the Lord said unto Moses, Take unto thee sweet spices, stacte, and onycha, and galbanum; these sweet spices, with pure frankincense; of each shall there be a like weight. These they were wont to burn upon the censer as they offered it, which made a most fragrant smell. That incense is a type of the merits of Jesus Christ, and seems also to be a type of the prayers of

God's people in faith of the former. It was the custom, when the priest in the temple was burning incense, for the people to be praying without, Luke 1:10, And the whole multitude of the people were praying without at the time of incense. And gracious prayer is compared to incense, Psa. 141:2, Let my prayer be set forth before thee as incense; and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice. The prayer of faith is as a fragrant savor to God, through the merits of him towards whom that faith is exercised.

REFLECTIONS

1. Here are great motives for all earnestly to seek that they may become true Christians. It is a great honor to be priests of God. It was a great honor of old to be a priest under the law. It was a greater in some respects than to be a king, because they were nearer to God, and they in their work were more immediately concerned with him: it was a more holy and divine office. But more honorable is it to be of the spiritual priesthood. The access to God is nearer, and an infinitely greater privilege. Especially is the access to God which they will have in another world, where they shall see God, and shall converse with Christ as a man with his friend. If ever a king was ambitious of the honor of the legal priesthood, surely you may well desire the spiritual, which is an eternal priesthood.

Consider that you are capable of receiving this priesthood. Of old, those who were not of the posterity of Aaron, were incapable of the priesthood. It was in vain for them to seek it, but it is not in vain for you to seek this spiritual priesthood. Consider also that you have a call to it, you have warrant sufficient. It would be a dreadful presumption for you to seek this honor if you had not a call to it, Heb. 5:4, No man taketh this honor unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron. But you are called, and now it would be presumption and profane contempt in you to refuse it: to refuse such an honor as God offers you. Take heed, therefore, that there be not among you any profane person as Esau, who for a morsel of meat sold his birthright, and sold the priesthood that belonged to it. Take heed that you do not sell this spiritual priesthood for a morsel of meat, or for the trifles of this world, that you are not more concerned about a little worldly pelf or vain glory, than about that which is so sacred and honorable.

For direction, that you may be one of this spiritual priesthood, seek of God his holy anointing, that is that God would pour out his Spirit in his sanctifying influences upon you. The priests of old were consecrated by the holy anointing oil, Exo. 29:7, Then shalt thou take the anointing oil, and pour it upon his head, and anoint him. Exo. 30:30, And thou shalt anoint Aaron and his sons, and consecrate them that they may minister unto me in the priest s office. If you are here separated for this holy station and service, you must have that holy anointing of the Spirit of God, typified by the oil that was poured upon Aaron s head. The holy anointing oil of God must be upon you.

2. Let all who profess themselves Christians take heed that they do not defile themselves and profane their sacred character. There was great strictness required of old of the priests, lest they should defile themselves and profane their office, and it was regarded as a dreadful thing to profane it. So holy a God hath threatened in the New Testament, that if any man defile the temple of God, him will God destroy. 1 Cor. 3:17. As Christians are here

called the temple of God, so it is said, in the fifth verse, Ye are a spiritual house, an holy priesthood. Avoid the commission of all immoralities, or things that have a horrid filthiness in them, things that will dreadfully profane the sacred name by which you are called, and the sacred station wherein you are set.

Take heed especially of lascivious impurities. Such things were looked upon as defiling the holy office of the priesthood of old, insomuch that if but a daughter of a priest was guilty of whoredom, she was to be burnt. Remember Hophni and Phineas, how sorely God dealt with them for profaning their office by their impurities, and with good Eli, that he was no more thorough to restrain them. God brought a curse upon the whole family which never was removed. God took away the priesthood from him, and took away the ark of the covenant from him and from Israel, and delivered it into captivity, and fulfilled his threatening, that there should not be an old man of his house forever.

Take heed of every sin: an allowing any sin whatever is a dreadful presumption of your holy character.

3. See that you well execute your office. Offer up your heart in sacrifice. Get and keep a near access to God. Come with boldness. Offer up a heart broken for sin; offer it up flaming with love to God; offer praise to God. Praise God for his glorious excellency, and for his love and mercy. Consider what great things you have to praise God for: the redemption of Jesus Christ, his sufferings, his obedience, and the gift of that holiness, which makes you like unto God.

Be ready to distribute, willing to communicate, and do good. Consider it is part of your office thus to do to which you are called and anointed, and as a sacrifice well-pleasing to God. Pity others in distress and be ready to help one another. God will have mercy and not sacrifice.

And be much in offering up your prayers to God, and see that all your offerings are offered upon the right altar, otherwise they will be abominable to God. Offer your hearts to God through Jesus Christ. In his name present the sacrifice of praise, obedience, charity, and of prayer on the golden altar perfumed with the incense of Christ's merits. Your reward will be to have this honor in heaven, to be exalted to that glorious priesthood, to be made a priest unto God forever and ever.