

The Papal and Hierarchical System - Part 4

by Joseph John Gurney

Joseph John Gurney preaches about the spiritual power of the priesthood, highlighting the dangers of the hierarchy's usurpation of authority and the abuse of spiritual power by the clergy, particularly under the papal system. He emphasizes the importance of Christ being the sole High Priest and the ultimate authority in the Church, rejecting the idea of human representatives or viceroys. Gurney delves into the scriptural basis for the priesthood, refuting the notions of absolution through human priests and the sacrificial system of the mass, asserting that Jesus' sacrifice on the cross is the only propitiation for sin. He also addresses the issue of miracles in the context of the papacy, distinguishing between the genuine miracles of the New Testament and the deceptive wonders claimed by the Roman Catholic Church.

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Transcript

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 topics: - name: "Priesthood Of Christ" slug: "priesthood-of-christ" - name: "Church Authority" slug: "church-authority" bibleRefs: - text: "Matthew 18:15" bookId: "MAT" chapter: "18" verse: "15" - text: "John 20:23" bookId: "JHN" chapter: "20" verse: "23" - text: "Acts 15:22" bookId: "ACT" chapter: "15" verse: "22" - text: "1 Corinthians 5:4" bookId: "1CO" chapter: "5" verse: "4" - text: "1 Timothy 2:5" bookId: "1TI" chapter: "2" verse: "5" - text: "Hebrews 7:26" bookId: "HEB" chapter: "7" verse: "26" - text: "Hebrews 13:15" bookId: "HEB" chapter: "13" verse: "15" - text: "James 5:16" bookId: "JAS" chapter: "5" verse: "16" - text: "1 Peter 5:2" bookId: "1PE" chapter: "5" verse: "2" outline: - heading: "I. The Usurpation of Temporal

Power by the Hierarchy" - heading: "A. The abuse of the magistrate's sword by the priesthood" - heading: "B. The corruption of primitive Christianity and the rise of the papal system" - heading: "II. The Spiritual Power of the Priesthood" - heading: "A. The usurpation of spiritual authority over the church" - heading: "B. The attempt to exercise functions belonging only to Christ" - heading: "III. The Papal System of Government" - heading: "A. The sway of the hierarchy over subordinate members of their class" - heading: "B. The rule of the priesthood over the laity" - heading: "IV. The Scriptural Doctrine of Church Government" - heading: "A. Jesus Christ as the High Priest of our profession" - heading: "B. Christ's immediate rule over his people" - heading: "C. The rejection of a viceregal authority over the church" faq: - q: "What is the main issue with the papal system of government?" a: "The papal system of government is based on despotic rule and implicit obedience, which is contrary to the scriptural doctrine of church government." - q: "What is the role of the priesthood in the papal system?" a: "In the papal system, the priesthood has usurped spiritual authority over the church and exercises functions that belong only to Christ." - q: "What is the scriptural doctrine of church government?" a: "The scriptural doctrine of church government is that Jesus Christ is the High Priest of our profession and exercises immediate rule over his people." - q: "What is the problem with the idea of a viceregal authority over the church?" a: "The idea of a viceregal authority over the church is rejected by scripture, as it would imply that Christ has appointed a human representative to rule in his place." - q: "What is the relationship between the clergy and the laity in the papal system?" a: "In the papal system, the clergy has a despotic power over the laity, which leads to ignorance and superstition among the people." quotes: - "There is probably no institution in the world, in which the system of absolute rule on the one hand, and implicit obedience on the other, is carried to so great a height as in that of the Romish hierarchy." - "The great secret of their success, and of the success of the whole papal system, is contained in these words, DESPOTIC RULE, IMPLICIT OBEDIENCE." - "Christ himself is represented in Scripture as the antitype of Moses, the ruler of the household of God." applicationPoints: - "We must reject the idea of a viceregal authority over the church, as it is contrary to the scriptural doctrine of church government." - "We must recognize the immediate rule of Christ over his people and submit to his authority." - "We must be aware of the dangers of despotic rule and implicit obedience in the papal system and seek to live in accordance with the scriptural doctrine of church government." keywords: - "papal system" - "despotic rule" - "implicit obedience" - "viceregal authority" - "scriptural doctrine of church government" - "Jesus Christ as High Priest" - "immediate rule of Christ" - "clergy and laity" - "ignorance and superstition" ---

ON THE SPIRITUAL POWER OF THE PRIESTHOOD.

IN the preceding chapter, we have considered the usurpation by the hierarchy, of temporal power, and the dreadful abuse which has been made by the priesthood, of the magistrate's sword. We may now direct our attention to the spiritual power of the same priesthood, gradually assumed as primitive Christianity became corrupted, and advancing to a most extravagant height, under the papal system. I conceive that there is no feature which so prominently marks the character of antichrist, as the former one now mentioned, viz., the usurpation and abuse, by the ministers of religion, of temporal power.

If however we find those ministers usurping a spiritual p74 authority over the church itself, which is foreign from their calling; if we find them attempting to exercise functions which belong only to Christ, the great Head of the church it must be confessed that here is another feature of the power which interferes with the righteous government of Christ, and therefore stands opposed to Him. The particulars of this subject, as they are developed under the papal system, are familiar to most persons.

They may be divided into two parts; first, the sway of the hierarchy over the subordinate members of their own class; and secondly, the rule of the priesthood over the laity. In both respects the apostolic precept, "neither be ye lords over God's heritage," is set aside, and the power of the clergy is found to amount to despotism. There is probably no institution in the world, in which the system of absolute rule on the one hand, and implicit obedience on the other, is carried to so great a height as in that of the Romish hierarchy.

The inferior clergy are completely subject to the superiors who are placed over them; these again to their superiors; and all, including the highest dignitaries, to the Pope, who claims to be the successor of St. Peter in the bishopric of Rome, and sole vicar and p75 representative of the Lord Jesus Christ upon earth. This system of absolute rule, not only applies to the regular clergy, but to all the orders of monks, nuns, and friars. A perfect obedience to superiors is the main law of all these bodies; and many of them are regulated, on a strictly military principle.

There is no army in the world more exactly arranged, more elaborately disciplined, more absolutely governed, or more effective in action, than the order of the Jesuits. Zealous, steady, and unceasing are they in their operations, which are ramified in a thousand different directions; ever opposed to all that is opposed to popery, ever aiming at the reduction of the world under the banner of Rome, ever pushing forward towards that vast object; calling all the devices of human policy into their service, weaving the web of the most plausible sophistry, and casting this dangerous network over the souls of men; unscrupulous as to the means, (if we are to believe Pascal and the Jansenists) because the end is, in their view, sanctified.

The great secret of their success, and of the success of the whole papal system, is contained in these words, DESPOTIC RULE, IMPLICIT OBEDIENCE. p76 The more we reflect on this vast fabric of internal government a system to which the world presents no parallel the more we shall perceive that it is the very masterpiece of human policy; nay, that it is so far super-human, that if we dare not trace it to the wisdom which cometh from above and this we cannot do we are almost compelled to believe, that some dark power, stronger and more crafty than man, is the true author of this professedly spiritual building.

If so, it will be found but frostwork after all, and will melt away in due season, before the bright beams of the Sun of righteousness, when He shall again arise upon the earth, as the glorious and all-sufficient Head of his own church, with healing on his wings. While we acknowledge the perfection of this policy, in a worldly point of view, a close examination of Scripture will serve to convince us, that Christianity contains no warrant whatsoever for any such system; but that, on the contrary, such a plan of church government, is in open opposition to the simplicity of the gospel of Christ.

In the first place, it is the clear doctrine of Scripture that Jesus Christ himself is the High Priest p77 of our profession; and that he actually governs his church on earth as well as in heaven, by the gentle touches of his love and power, by the immediate influences of his Holy Spirit. He never appointed a representative or viceroy, on whom the office might devolve of reigning over the visible church in his stead; one whose supreme will should be law to all the subordinate orders of his servants or ministers.

Christ himself is represented in Scripture as the antitype of Moses, the ruler of the household of God. Moses was faithful in that household as a servant of God, under whose authority he acted -- "Christ, as a Son, over his own house." When we read of a spiritual potentate on earth, who assumes the right of ruling the family of God, according to his own good will and pleasure, yet as God's vicegerent, we read of that

which may have some faint shadow of a resemblance in the Jewish high-priesthood, but which is utterly at variance with the Christian dispensation, under which Christ himself is the sole absolute ruler, and ever present helper of his people.

Had it been the will of the great Head of the church to appoint a supreme viceroy, such as the Pope assumes to be, he would surely have invested p78 some one of the apostles with this vast function, and would have defined the law of future succession. But no such circumstance is recorded, or in the most distant manner alluded to, in the New Testament. True indeed it is, that Peter, with all his faults, was pre-eminent in faith and love; and after our Lord's ascension was foremost in pleading the cause of his Master, and in feeding the little flock of the disciples of Jesus.

But this apostle was invested by his Lord with no supreme authority over his brethren, nor is there the slightest ground for supposing that he exercised any such authority, after the ascension of Christ. In order to a full clearing of the subject, it may be well to advert to the passage of our Lord's discourses, on which the Roman Catholic church builds her faith in the supremacy of Peter: see Matt. xvi. 13 20. "When Jesus came into the coasts of Cesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of Man am?

And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist, some Elias, and others Jeremias, or one of the prophets. He saith unto them but whom say ye that I am? and Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living p79 God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou Simon Bar-jona; for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Then charged he his disciples that they should tell no man that he was Jesus the Christ." Almost immediately afterwards we find Peter rebuked by his Master, for his carnal and worldly views; "Get thee behind me Satan; for thou savourest not the things that be of God but those that be of men."

These words of severe rebuke afford a strong indication, that the preceding declaration is to be understood in no sense which can involve the exaltation of Peter above his brethren. It appears to be wholly at variance with the scope of the gospel, to imagine that our Saviour here represented his poor erring servant, so zealous and yet so weak, as the rock on which his church p80 was to be built. If however, the expressions, "On this rock or stone I will build my church" have any reference to Peter, it must surely be in a subordinate sense, and must be understood as alluding to his eminent services, in unison with the other apostles, in preaching the gospel both to Jews and Gentiles, and thus through the power of the Holy Spirit, establishing Christianity in the world.

It is on this ground, doubtless, that the twelve foundations of the New Jerusalem are described in the Revelation, as composed of precious stones, each of its peculiar colour, and marked with the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. Paul also in his epistle to the Ephesian converts, salutes them as persons who were "no more strangers and foreigners, but of the household of faith built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets," &c. The preaching of the apostles was in its nature fundamental; it had respect to that Saviour, who is himself the only rock on which is built the superstructure of truth, and the fabric of the true and living church: and no sooner do we depart from the ground which was thus clearly

marked out by the apostles, than we are at sea in the things of God, exposed to every wind of human opinion, and liable to be wrecked in every storm which may be raised by the power and craftiness of the enemy of our souls.

In the proper sense of the terms, Christ has no human partner or fellow, in his character of the Foundation. The doctrine of Scripture on this subject is most explicit, "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Christ Jesus:" 1 Cor. iii. 11; comp. Isa. xxviii. 16. So far then as Peter was instrumental in founding the Lord's church on earth, he was one in dignity and function, (though a leader amongst them in point of love, zeal, and success) with the rest of the apostles.

But it is surely far more consistent with the whole tenor of the New Testament to understand the words of Jesus, as applying to our Saviour himself. Peter says, "Thou art the Christ the Son of the living God." Jesus answered, "On this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." The answer was explicit; and that it was well understood by Peter, is evident from the uniform tenor of his discourses and writings, in all which he never directed the attention of the people to himself but always to Christ, "If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious, to whom coming as unto A LIVING STONE, &c. ye also as lively stones are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

Wherefore also it is contained in the Scripture, Behold I lay in Zion (for a FOUNDATION -- Hebrew) a CHIEF CORNER STONE, elect, precious, and he that believeth on HIM, shall not be confounded:" 1 Pet. ii. 36. With respect to the expressions which follow, I conceive that to hold the keys of the kingdom of heaven, is perfectly synonymous with possessing the power of binding or loosening. The blessed truths which Peter preached were the means of opening the door of the kingdom of heaven, to all believers.

Thus the keys of that door were placed in his hands; and in his capacity of an inspired apostle, the power was given to him, both of loosening and binding the captive soul. The willing and obedient hearers of these glad tidings were delivered from all their bonds. On the contrary, those who resisted the truths of Christianity, experienced the confirmation and aggravation of their spiritual captivity. The very dust of the feet of the apostles was shaken off against them. These inspired preachers who were "a savour of life unto life" to some, were thus to others "a savour of death unto death."

Such I apprehend to be the true intent of this promise; but, whatever was its meaning, it marked no peculiar authority or dignity in Peter, above his brethren. These functions and privileges belonged to all the anointed servants of Christ; and we soon afterwards find the same power committed to the disciples in a body; "Verily I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven; again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven; for where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them:" Matt, xviii. 18-20.

Not a shadow of evidence remains, that Peter was invested with a viceregal authority over the church. That in point of fact, he possessed no such superiority, and exercised no such power, is evident from Paul's declaration that he (Paul) was "not a whit behind the very chiefest apostles," 2 Cor. xi. 5; also from the fact, elsewhere recorded, that when Peter failed to maintain the liberty of the gospel, among the converts at Antioch, Paul "withstood him to his face;" and reprov'd him without the smallest reserve or ceremony: Gal. ii. 11-21.

It was not Peter who governed Paul; nor can it be the supposed successors of Peter, who govern the ministers of the Lord in the present day; it is Christ, the High Priest of our profession, who was the only master of Peter and Paul, and of all the prophets, apostles, and evangelists of primitive Christianity; and who is still the only master of the living ministers of his own gospel. Nothing can be more to the point, in reference to the present subject, than some of the conversations of our Lord with his disciples.

The question, "which of them should be the greatest," or "the greatest in the kingdom of heaven," was a subject of eager dispute and discussion among the followers of Jesus; but their divine Master gave no countenance to any such ambitious views as they in their weakness were prone to entertain. He set a little child in the midst of them as a pattern; and said, "He that is least among you all, the same shall be great:" Luke ix. 46, 48; Matt, xviii. 14; Mark ix. 34-37. On another occasion, p85 he gave them explicit directions to the same effect "Be not ye called Rabbi, (or Master,) for ONE is your master, even Christ, and ALL YE are brethren:" Matt, xxiii. 8.

The view now taken of the immediate rule of Christ over his people, is confirmed by the wellknown circumstance, that the primitive church, scattered as it was over many cities and countries, was never arranged as a single united fabric, under a scale of human officers every one depending on his superior and all on a single supreme ruler on earth. On the contrary, the congregations of Christians both among Jews and Gentiles were severally independent, in the matter of government.

They were under the care of their own elders and overseers, and with the help of this local government, conducted their own affairs yet always in subjection to the supreme and immediate rule of the risen and glorified Saviour. He it was, who, having ascended up on high, and having led captivity captive, poured forth the gifts and graces of his Holy Spirit according to his own will; and "he gave some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the perfecting of the p86 saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:" Eph. iv. 11,12.

And He it is who still selects, appoints, qualifies, and governs his own ministers, to whatsoever grade, and whatsoever denomination they may belong. We must now advert to the second point -- the power of the priesthood over the lay members of the church of Christ. That this power, under the papal system, has advanced to an intolerable height, cannot be denied by those who have any acquaintance with the condition of the people in Roman Catholic countries, and especially in Ireland, where the will of the priest, to a very great extent, is law to all the members of his congregation.

The discipline of the church is wholly in the hands of ecclesiastics, and that discipline is often exercised with great severity. Confession and penance are fearful weapons by which the less educated part of mankind, and not that part exclusively, are bowed and broken under the hands of the priesthood. Yet the terror of impending penance is nothing in comparison with the assumption, of the power of binding and p87 loosening, in the sense of retaining and forgiving sins. On the priest alone rests the divine prerogative of absolution; and therefore, with the Papist, disobedience to the priest is death to the soul.

Every act of religious liberty, every effort of the mind after a free inquiry into truth, every step towards an independent exercise of the understanding and conscience in the things of God, is barred by the consideration that if the priest is offended, absolution cannot be obtained, and the soul must therefore be lost. Again it is notorious that in the view of those deluded votaries of the sacerdotal office, there is no safety for a departing soul, unless certain viatica to heaven, (the sacramental wafer and extreme unction, for example) can be obtained from the priest.

Who then shall dare resist the authority of his ecclesiastical ruler, at the risk of being deprived of these viatica? Or if we take purgatory into view, what sincere adherent of the Romish system, would venture, by disobeying his priest, to lose the benefit, after quitting this mortal scene, of the sacrifice of the mass for the dead? It is certain that all these superstitions have combined to throw a power over the laity more p88 than despotic, into the hands of the Romish clergy; nor will the calm and accurate observer fail to remark, that both parties are deep sufferers from such a system.

Its natural consequence, among the clergy, is bigotry and arrogance; among the people, ignorance and superstition. Having thus adverted to the facts of the case, facts of the most notorious character, we may advance to the question, What says the Scripture in reference to this subject? And in answering this question, we cannot do better than adduce, in the first place, a memorable passage from the catholic epistle of Peter himself, in which he not only places himself on a ground of perfect equality with his brethren, but utterly repudiates the notion that those whom the Holy Ghost has appointed to be overseers of the flock, are to exercise lordship by which we may understand a despotic power over those who are thus committed to their charge.

"The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder (an elder with them) and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed. Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, p89 not by constraint but willingly: not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as being lords over God's heritage; but as ensamples to the flock Likewise ye younger submit yourselves unto the elder, yea all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility, for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble;" 1 Pet. v. 15.

From this passage it is evident, that nothing analogous to the despotic spiritual power of the Romish priesthood, was allowed in primitive days; that while the chosen servants of the Lord, who were elders in the truth, (whether they were so in years or not,) were engaged in superintending and feeding the flock, they were not permitted to exercise a mastership over the body but that all the members of the church were to be subject one to another in love. On a further investigation of the subject, I believe we shall find that the power of inflicting the discipline of the church, rested not with the overseers, elders, or preachers, in their distinct capacity, but with the church itself.

Of this fact we have plain scriptural evidence in the following precept of Jesus. "Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go p90 and tell him his fault between thee and him alone if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, &c.; and if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church" &c.: Matt, xviii. 15-17. It was the church therefore, not the apostles -- only not the preachers or elders alone but the whole body or congregation, to whom the final appeal was to be made in a matter of discipline, and by whom, (under Christ,) that matter was to be settled.

It is a satisfactory circumstance, that in the epistles of Paul, we are furnished with an example, in which our Lord's precept was in this respect carried into effect. A member of the Corinthian church had committed an incestuous crime; and what says the apostle on the occasion? "For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that hath so done this deed. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, to deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord p91 Jesus purge out therefore the old leaven," &c.

Here Paul, in his apostolic character, directs, and rightly directs, the action of the church. Nevertheless it is the church itself, the assembled body of Christians at Corinth, who were to act in this affair of discipline, in dependence on the power of Christ; to deliver up the offender to Satan, (for the infliction, I suppose of some disease) and to purge out the old leaven, by excommunication or disownment. There can be no doubt that the church at Corinth acted, according to the apostle's injunction in the case; and, in his second epistle, we find him calling on the same body not the overseers and elders alone, but the church in its corporate capacity to restore the now penitent believer, to their unity and favour: see 1 Cor. v., 2 Cor. ii.

According to the primitive plan therefore, the authority to inflict discipline rests not with any priesthood, but with the body of Christ. The same may be said of confession, which according to the apostolic plan, had nothing clerical in its bearing "Confess your faults ONE to ANOTHER, and pray ONE FOR ANOTHER, that ye may be healed:" James v. 16. But it was not only in matters of discipline that p92 the authority under Christ, rested with the whole company of the believers.

When regulations were to be made for the conduct of the Lord's people, it was the people themselves, who, with due regard to the judgment of their spiritual guides, enacted those regulations. Thus the decree respecting the freedom of the Gentile converts from the yoke of the Jewish ceremonial law, was agreed upon by the assembled body of Christians at Jerusalem, and was issued in the name of "the apostles, and elders, and brethren:" see Acts xv. 4, 12, 22, 23. The government was essentially democratic, as it regarded the members of the body; but it was a democracy, like that of ancient Israel, under the immediate control and guidance of the great Head of the church.

The conclusion to which the church arrived on this occasion, seemed good to the apostles, and elders, and brethren, for this simple reason, that it also "seemed good to the Holy Ghost:" ver. 28. In the case of the incestuous member of the Corinthian church, we may observe that the assembly of Christians which inflicted the disciplinary sentence, was afterwards exhorted by the apostle Paul to forgive the offender. This circumstance p93 affords a clue to the most probable meaning of our Lord's address to his disciples recorded in John xx. 23.

"Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them, and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained." There is no reason to conclude that this commission was intended to be confined to the apostles; it is rather to be regarded as declarative of the power which was to reside in the church, or whole body of believers in any place that of remitting or retaining the sins of transgressing members of the body, so far as related to discipline. When the offender was excommunicated or otherwise punished, and during the continuance of the penalty, his sin was retained by the church; and when again he was restored to favour, it was remitted or forgiven by his brethren; and their decrees on the subject were ratified by the sanction and fiat of their divine Master, under the guidance of whose Spirit it was their privilege to act.

But to apply this declaration to that retaining of sins, of which the awful consequence is the fire never to be quenched; and to that forgiveness of them, through which the penitent sinner, believing in the Lord Jesus, is delivered from the pains of hell, and obtains an p94 immortality of bliss, is surely in the highest degree at variance with the principles of divine truth. Who can forgive sins but God alone? was a question which the Pharisees asked, when Jesus forgave the palsied suppliant.

Nor could any man fail to answer, NO ONE. Sin is the transgression of the law of God; and, in the very nature of things, none but God can pardon it, and absolve the sinner from its awful consequences. Jesus had "power on earth to forgive sins," because he was the Son of God -- one with the Father. "I even I am

he that blotteth out thine iniquities for mine own sake," said Jehovah to Israel, "and will not remember thy sins," Isa. xliii. 25; and again, "I will forgive their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more," Jer. xxxi. 34.

An apostle, under the immediate inspiration of the Holy Spirit, might indeed pronounce the forgiveness of sins; but the act of pardon is a divine prerogative, which belongs exclusively to the Judge of all flesh, and may well be regarded as the brightest jewel in his crown of righteousness and glory. The assumption of a power to forgive sins, and all the odious consequences which have followed p95 from it, form one of the principal antichristian features of the papal hierarchy.

Here is the blasphemy of the "man of sin," in pretending to the possession of the most sacred of the divine attributes. Here is that sitting "on the throne of God" and that exalting of himself "above all that is called God," of which we read in Scripture. Here too is the mercantile abomination of Babylon, so vividly depicted in the visions of John. Money is poured into her treasury by the kings of the earth, and by their subjects and followers and the article received in return, is the Pope's pardon of sins that are past, and the Pope's permission to sin for the future.

The gross and enormous traffic which Rome has carried on in this article of indulgence to the sinful propensities of man, is certainly one of the strangest instances of human wickedness, under the plea of religion, that ever disgraced the history of our species. This professed angel of mercy, is surely nothing better than Satan in transformation; and yet so transformed as to be scarcely concealed. That this system which claims the power of absolution for man, and even sanctions his selling that blessed boon, is at once immoral and impious, no reflecting Christian p96 whether Protestant or Roman Catholic, can with any reason deny.

But independently of the supposed power of absolution, there remains the sacerdotal authority, armed with the propitiatory sacrifice of the mass, by which to enthrall the souls of men, and bring them under slavery to their spiritual guides. What then says the Scripture, first, on the subject of sacrifice; and secondly, on that of the sacerdotal office in the church of Christ? It plainly indicates that under the gospel there is recognized no propitiatory sacrifice, but the one offering of Jesus on the cross; and no one who holds the sacerdotal office, but the risen and glorified Saviour himself.

I. A calm review of the doctrine of the New Testament, on the subject of propitiation, may soon satisfy us, that the popish invention of the sacrifice of the mass, is not only without the shadow of support from Scripture, but is opposed to some of the fundamental principles of Christianity. Christianity declares in the first place, that the sacrifices ordained by the Jewish law, were simply ceremonial in their nature that "the blood of goats and of calves could not take away sin;" that they were the mere types of good things to come; p97 and that having now served their purpose, in foreshadowing the sacrifice of Christ, they form no part of the religion or worship of the disciples of Jesus.

In the mean time, the one great offering of Christ on the cross, is every where insisted on, in the New Testament, as the means of our reconciliation with God, and as the sole ground of our deliverance from punishment, and of our hope of heaven. Our Saviour himself frequently alluded to this great doctrine: (John iii. 14, &c.) and no one who has the least acquaintance with the New Testament, can fail to be aware how frequently the propitiatory offering of Christ is dwelt upon by the apostles.

The subject is concentrated in the declaration of Peter, that "we are not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from our vain conversation received by tradition from our fathers, but by the precious

blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot," 1 Pet. i. 18, 19; and the universality of the application of this sacrifice to mankind, is set forth in the epistle of John, "He was the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but for the sins of the whole world:" 1 John ii. 2. p98 But in the Epistle to the Hebrews more especially are we taught, that the atoning death of Christ the end and fulfilment of the shadows of the law; and that this propitiation having been made once for all, all sacrifice for sin ceases.

"For such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens, who needeth not daily as those high priests to offer up sacrifice first for their own sins and then for the people; for this he did ONCE, having offered up himself:" chap. vii. 26, 27. "For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us: nor yet that he should offer himself often as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year with the blood of others, (for then must he often have suffered from the foundation of the world;) but now ONCE in the end of the world, hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself; and as it is appointed unto man once to die, and after that the judgment; so Christ was ONCE offered to bear the sins of many, and unto them that look for him, shall he appear, the second time, without sin (or a sin-offering) unto p99 salvation:" chap. ix. 24 28.

Again, "And every priest standeth daily ministering, and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: but this man, after he had offered ONE sacrifice for sins, for ever sat down on the right hand of God for by ONE offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified:" chap. x. 11 14. To conclude, it is the clear doctrine of this inspired writer, that if we sin wilfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, (and have thus belied our faith in this one sacrifice) "there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin:" the sacrifices of the Jewish law are fulfilled, and in point of authority for ever abolished; the one availing offering of Jesus Christ on the cross is rejected by the apostate who falls from grace; and there remaineth no other sacrifice whatsoever.

When we aver on apostolic authority, that "there remaineth no other sacrifice whatsoever," we do not forget that true Christians of every name and class are, "a holy nation, a royal priesthood," to offer up " SPIRITUAL sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ:" 1 Pet. ii. 5. They present their bodies and souls, even the whole man, "a living p100 sacrifice" which is certainly no more than their "reasonable service:" Rom. xii. 1. They can give ear to the apostolic exhortation: "Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach: for here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come.

By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise continually, that is the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to his name; but to do good and communicate forget not, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased:" Heb. xiii. 13 16. Such and such only are the sacrifices which Christianity recognizes: First, the one propitiatory offering of Jesus on the cross, by which alone we are redeemed, and to which mankind, all the world over, and in every succeeding age, are freely invited to look, in simple faith, and without the mediation of any human priesthood, for the forgiveness of their sins: and secondly, the grateful return, on the part of Christian believers, of a loving and obedient heart, and of a life devoted to the service and glory of God. 2.

From this scriptural view of the subject, it is abundantly evident that the Romish sacrifice of the mass, perpetually offered up as it is, as a propitiation p101 for sin, is not only unauthorized by the gospel of Jesus Christ, but is wholly opposed to its nature, character, and spirit. Now where there is no sacrifice, there is no priest; for sacrifice is the essential characteristic of the sacerdotal office. The continuance of that office, under the papal and hierarchical system, is nothing better than a recurrence to the old plan of Jewish worship, and stands opposed to the simplicity of the truth and spirituality of the gospel

dispensation.

A Priest is not only a minister but a mediator; he stands between the people and their God; he offers up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and afterwards for those of the people. But, in this glorious gospel day, as we know only one God, so we know only one "Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus, who gave his life a ransom for all." 1 Tim. ii. 5. In the distribution of spiritual gifts and offices, we read that the risen and glorified Saviour "gave some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ;" we read also of presbyters or elders, of bishops or overseers, of p102 deacons or servants; but among all these we hear nothing whatsoever of the priest.

We must therefore conclude that Jesus is the ONLY priest of the Christian church. In Him the shadows of the law, and especially the whole sacrificial system, are for ever fulfilled. He has died, once for all, for the sins of the whole world; he is ever present with his people to bless them in the name of his Father; he is their never failing Advocate and Intercessor before the throne of God; he carries the names of all the tribes of the true Israel, as on his breastplate, before the Lord; like Aaron, he bears the iniquity even of our "holy things."

The Lord hath sworn and will not repent, saith the Father to the Son, "Thou art a Priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek." Uniting in himself the regal and sacerdotal offices, he both mediates and reigns, and supplies, in both respects, the whole need of his universal church. Ecclesiastical systems, invented by men, shall last their season, and then vanish. The finest fabrics of human policy, in the things of religion, shall perish before the breath of the Lord Almighty; but Jesus Christ, our only High Priest, is "the same yesterday, and to-day, p103 and for ever," and "of the increase of his government and peace there shall be NO END."

There is no point which more clearly betrays the identity of the antichrist of Scripture with Papal Rome, and none more marked and conspicuous in the history of her system, than her assumption of the power of working miracles. It may safely be asserted that the wonders pretended to be wrought under the authority of the Papacy, are, practically speaking, innumerable. This is the portentous evidence so overwhelming to the ignorant and superstitious mind on which the Romish hierarchy has mainly relied, in the support of her pretensions to universal empire, both temporal and spiritual.

The legends of her monasteries, and the stories of her saints (whether suffering on earth, or beatified in heaven) are full of these strange infractions of the order of nature. The greater part of these anomalies are marked by such obvious absurdity, as to excite only the smile of derision; yet they have served the purpose of deceiving, and keeping in sore captivity, p104 millions of ignorant devotees. Such delusions can be classed only with the tricks of the juggler. Others, undoubtedly, are more unaccountable in their nature, and more difficult of detection; and may perhaps serve to remind us, that evil spirits may still have some power permitted them over the laws of nature, as in the days of Moses and the magicians.

Let no man suppose that there is any real similitude between the "lying wonders" of popery, and the miracles of the New Testament. The former are, as a whole, lighter than vanity; the latter fixed and substantial as a rock. The difference between them is to be observed, in three essential particulars; first, the evidence of their reality -- that of the Christian miracles being overpowering, while that of the popish wonders is notoriously weak; secondly, their intrinsic nature -- the Christian miracles being in every respect truly great, and worthy of their Author, while most of the popish wonders are puerile in the

extreme; and thirdly, the character of the system, which they are respectively intended to maintain.

The Christian miracles are among the irrefragable supports of a religion of perfect benevolence, justice, p105 and holiness. The popish wonders are the wretched props of false and dangerous doctrine, and of usurped, unrighteous power. It is on the most rational grounds that the former demand our sincere and hearty credence; and it is for reasons equally convincing, that the latter must be calmly but resolutely disallowed.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/joseph-john-gurney-/the-papal-and-hierarchial-system-part-4/>

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