

## ***The “Special Priesthood” and the so-called “Apostolic Succession”***

The above title alone would have been sufficient reason to upset the apostles and the rest of the early Church\* of our Lord Jesus Christ; in fact, they would have attacked the very root of this concept and they would have pronounced it as anathema (accursed).

In his book, “Royal Priesthood” Mr. S. Charalabakis wrote, “to the true Church of Christ the Special Priesthood is a foreign and strange element.”

Those who have studied the New Testament and other writings of early Christian writers have observed that those who served the Church were called “**Elders**” (Πρεσβύτεροι --- presvyteree), “**Overseers**” (Επίσκοποι --- episkopee), and “**Deacons**” (Διάκονοι --- diakonee’). Let’s have a closer look at those three titles:

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\* *My studies have led me to believe that the true Church, the Body of Christ, is not a religious institution but the born-again, those men and women who believe that Jesus Christ is “**God over all and blessed forever**” (Romans 9:5; from the Greek text), and who are indwelled by His Spirit (Romans 8:9).*

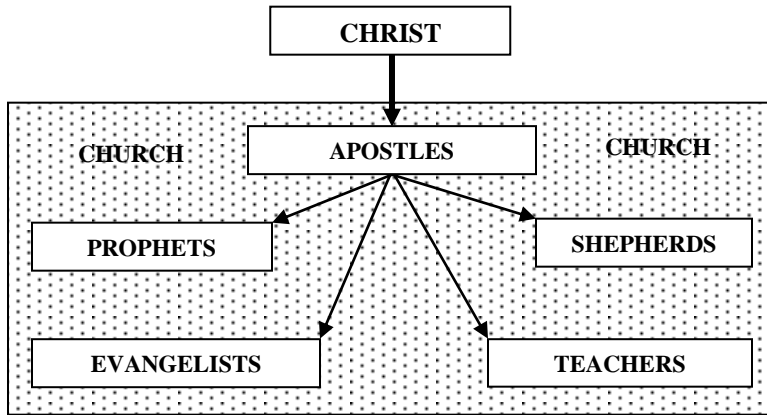
a) “**Πρεσβύτερος**” (presvyteros) is a person who is advanced in life, **an elder**, a senior.

b) “**Επίσκοπος**” (episkopos) is a person who is knowledgeable enough to oversee a work done by others; **an overseer**.

c) “**Διάκονος**” (diakonos) is a person who serves others; **a domestic servant**; a person who waits upon others.

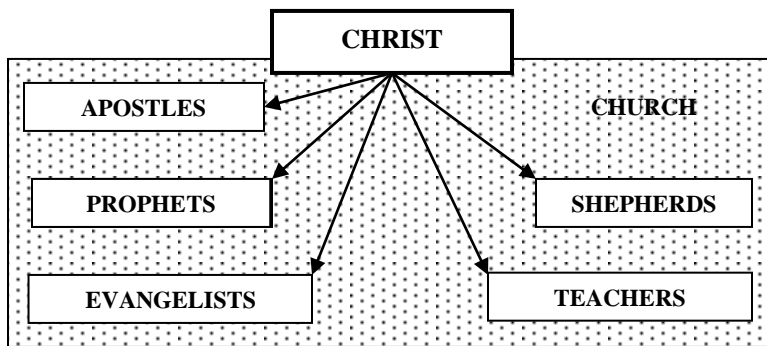
In the early Christian Church, the titles **elder** and **overseer** referred to the same position of service; in other words, an elder was an overseer and an overseer was an elder (Acts 20:17 -- **elders**; Philippians 1:1 -- **overseers**; 1 Timothy 3:1 -- **overseers**; Titus 1:5 -- **elders**; Titus 1:7 -- **overseers**; Acts 15:2,4,6,22,23 -- **elders**).

The laying on of hands in order to appoint an elder or a deacon to a position of Church service is Scriptural. However, there is not one verse to indicate that the apostles ever laid their hands upon the heads of elders and deacons in order to transfer to them the right to exercise authority as lords over the rest of the believers in Christ. The apostles could not have done such a thing because they never had that kind of authority themselves (Matthew 20:25,26). The doctrine which declares that **the apostles were the only ones who received their “great authority” from Christ, and in turn, they distributed “smaller authorities” to others in the Church, that is, to the prophets, to the evangelists, to the teachers, and to the pastors, is not based on the Scriptures.** The foregoing **false doctrine**, can be represented by the following diagram:



Now, let us compare the above diagram with the words of the apostle Paul from Ephesians 4:10-12. Speaking about Christ, he said, *“He that came down is the same who also went up above all the heavens, that he might fill all things. And He gave some to be apostles; some, prophets; some, evangelists; some, pastors and teachers; with a view to the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ;”*

According to these verses, we are compelled to change the previous diagram and present it as follows:



From the above diagram, we observe that the apostles were **one of the “gifts”** which Christ placed in the Church along with the other members of the body, for the building up of the entire body --- **not to exercise authority over it!**

Another thing we observe from the above representation of Ephesians 4:10-12, is **the absence of “Special Priests”**. In fact, **the New Testament does not mention anywhere that the apostles and the rest of the Church ever appointed believers to make up a “Special Priesthood”**. It was well understood by all that **all the believers in Christ are made priests, composing a royal priesthood, a holy priesthood, a kingdom of priests** who worship God in spirit and truth (1 Peter 2:5,9; Hebrews 4:16; 13:15,16; Revelation 1:6; John 4:24). Thus, **the presence of a “Special Priesthood” among a people who make up a kingdom of priests is not only unscriptural; it is also ridiculous, out of place and useless!** If the King of kings were to return today, He would ask again, *“Friend, how did you come in here?”* (Matthew 22:12).

**OTHER POINTS TO CONSIDER**

**1.** The “Special Priests” say that Jesus gave the power to “bind and to loose” to the apostles only and explain that the power to “bind and to loose” refers to **the authority to forgive or to refuse forgiveness of sins**. Therefore, in order to justify the existence of a “special priesthood” within the Christian community, it is claimed that today the “special priesthood” has this power to “bind and to loose” and that they received that authority through the so-called **“apostolic succession”**.

The above application of “binding and loosing” is not Scriptural. The expression “bind and loose” has nothing to

do with the forgiveness of sins. **Only God can forgive sins.** “Bind and loose” is a Hebrew expression; it refers to one’s authority to “**permit or to reject**”. It means that God gave to all the believers in Christ the privilege to permit or to reject a person from continuing to be part of a local assembly. It was part of local Church discipline for the purpose of helping a sinner to realize his sinful ways. **This privilege was not given only to the apostles** (Matthew 18:15-20; 16:19; 1 Corinthians 5:1-6; 1 Timothy 1:18-20).

**The apostles never used the authority to “bind and to loose” for forgiving sins.** A prime example is the case of Simon the magician. When Simon asked the apostle Peter to give him the gift of imparting the Holy Spirit by the laying on of hands in exchange for money, Peter rejected his proposition. At the same time, **Peter did not invite the Magician to come to him for forgiveness, neither did he send Simon to another believer to confess in order to receive forgiveness for his sins, but he sent him directly to God.** Peter told Simon that he “*might*” be forgiven because he doubted the Magician’s true repentance; Acts 8:18-24).

The only verse the “Special Priests” use in order to support their claim that they have the authority to forgive sins, is John 20:23. There, we read, “*If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.*”

The “Special Priests” have deliberately abused and misapplied the above words. If one **does not examine** the context and the rest of the Scriptures which refer to the same case, one could easily be misled. For this reason, it would be beneficial for us to examine this issue carefully, comparing

it with the words of Luke 24:36-49, in order to answer some important questions:

**Q.** Who spoke the words of John 20:23?

**A.** Jesus (John 20:19; Luke 24:36).

**Q.** When?

**A.** After His resurrection.

**Q.** To whom did He say these words?

**A.** To His disciples (John 20:20).

**Q.** When it says, “*His disciples*”, does it refer exclusively to His twelve apostles?

**A.** No! Jesus had many disciples (Luke 10:1). Moreover, Judas the Iscariot was not present because he had committed suicide prior to that day (Matthew 27:5), Matthias had not yet replaced him (Acts 1:26), and Thomas was absent (John 2:24). What can we say? Did Jesus give the “authority” to forgive sins only to the ten?

**Q.** If, indeed, He gave them the authority to forgive sins, does this mean that an apostle or a disciple of the Lord had the authority to say to an unbeliever, “**I forgive your sins**”? Or did he perhaps have the authority to say to a believer who had repented, “**I do not forgive your iniquity!**”?

**A.** No, of course not! The message of the gospel is clear: The sins of the world are washed away by the blood of

Christ, **ONLY IF** the sinners will recognize Him as the “**Lord**” (YHWH) whose Name one must “call upon” (to pray to) **in order to be saved and IF they will believe in their heart that God raised Him bodily (Acts 2:31) from the dead (Romans 10:9,13).** Those who will not fulfill with faith the above requirements for salvation which God has placed will not be saved; **their sins will not be forgiven.** Jesus said it clearly: Those who will not believe that He Is the One He said that He Is, that is, **God’s only begotten** (not only created) **Son** (John 3:16), a fact which shows beyond any doubt that **Jesus is God by nature** (John 1:1), **will die in their sins** regardless of the number of prayers on their behalf from those who claim that have the authority to forgive sins!

The good news that one’s sins are washed away **the very moment one believes in the True Jesus of the Bible, who is the “Most Holy One” of Daniel 9:24 who was to become anointed, in other words, to become the Christ,** was to be preached to the world by all the disciples of Jesus. For this reason, Jesus said to them, **“*Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, ...*”** (Luke 24:46,47). Therefore, His disciples have the “authority” to say to a person who just believed in the True Christ of the Bible, **“Your sins are forgiven in the name of Jesus”**, and, on the other hand, to a person who refuses to believe in Him, **“Your sins remain”**. **The only man who has the authority to forgive sins is the God-man Jesus Christ** (John 1:1,14; Mark 2:5-12). The claim of the “Special Priests” that they have the authority to forgive or to retain one’s sins is contrary to the true gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ!

2. Another point I wish to mention is the fact that **the apostles never used their privilege to “bind and to loose” in order to exercise authority over the rest of the Church of Christ**; neither did they ever call themselves, or any other believer, “**bishop**” (Δεσπότης --- ‘despotis’ in Greek), which means: “**Master**”, “**Lord**”, **a person who owns slaves and rules over them with an absolute and uncontrolled power**. With all respects and humility, the apostles reserved this title for God and Christ alone, and called themselves “**slaves**” or “**servants**” of God and of Christ (1 Timothy 6:1,2; 2 Timothy 2:21; Titus 2:9; 1 Peter 2:18; Job 5:8; 2 Peter 2:1; Jude 4; Romans 1:1; James 1:1; 2 Peter 1:1; Jude 1:1). The only authority Jesus gave to those who believe in Him is to cast out demons, to heal the sick, and to have authority over all the power of the enemy --- **not over His Church** (Matthew 10:1; Luke 10:19).

3. From the Old Testament we learn that God had selected and appointed the Levites to form a special priesthood. A **kind of “succession”** existed in that special priesthood as the priesthood’s responsibilities were passed from the fathers to the sons. But, from the New Testament we learn that Jesus became a priest according to the order of Melchizedek --- **outside the special Aaronic priesthood** (Hebrews 6:20). According to the New Testament, **“succession” in the Christian Church is non-existent** because whosoever believes in the True Jesus of the Bible, who is **God the Word who became flesh** (John 1:1,14), **becomes, at once, a priest** (Revelation 1:6; 5:10; 1 Peter 1:5,9).

4. In Hebrews 7:24,25, we read:

*“but He (Jesus) has the priesthood not to be passed on (Greek: “απαράβατον” [aparavaton] --- it means that His*



priesthood is **untransferable**, that it cannot be passed on to successors) *because of His continuing forever. From this also He is able to save to perfection those who come to God through Him, ever living to intercede for them.*” (Author’s parenthesis and emphasis).

Therefore, the very concept of having a system of “special priests” and “high priests” that claim “succession”, **is an insult to the eternal and “απαράβατον”/untransferable priesthood of Jesus!**

5. In Hebrews 10:11-14, we read: *“And indeed every priest stands day by day ministering, and often offering the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But He (Jesus), offering but one sacrifice for sins, sat down in perpetuity at the right hand of God, ... For by one offering (His own sacrifice on the cross) He has perfected in perpetuity the ones being sanctified.”*

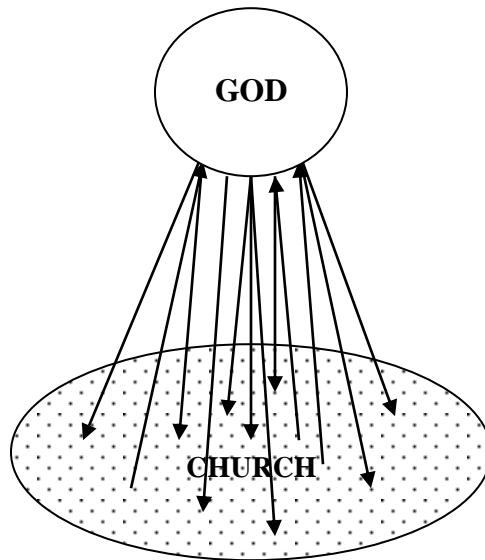
From the above, it is very clear that although the priests of Israel offered daily sacrifices, they were unable to forgive the sins of their people forever. Also, it is manifest that Jesus put them **“out of commission”**, so to speak, because by one offering (His own sacrifice) **He has perfected in perpetuity** (forever) **those who believe in Him**. Therefore, the presence of a “special priesthood” within the Christian Church, which attempts to perfect the believers through rituals and masses, **undermines, nullifies, and insults the eternal effectiveness of the one offering of Jesus.**

6. In John 14:23, we read the following words of Jesus:

*“... if anyone loves Me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love him. And we will come to him and we will dwell in him.”*

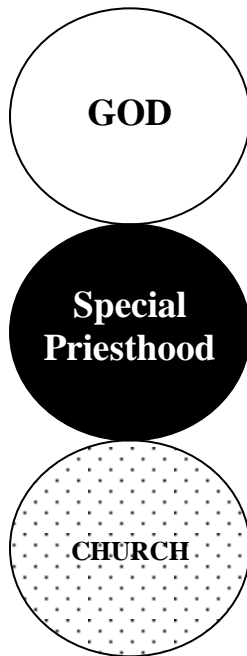
From the above words, and from 1 Corinthians 6:19, 2 Corinthians 6:16, and Romans 8:9-11, we learn that **those who believe in the True Christ of the Bible, are God’s temple because God indwells them.**

Now, let us suppose that the following diagram represents the Church, that is, all the believers, and their interactive relationship with the Godhead that dwells in them:



If those who make up the Church will allow the existence of a “special priesthood” **in order to function on their behalf**, their precious personal interactive relationship with

God **will cease to exist!** The only hope the believers will have to be in touch with God, will be, supposedly, through the “special priesthood” class, as is demonstrated by the following diagram. This diagram shows how the circle of the “special priesthood” touches God, as they claim, from one side, and the believers in Christ, from the other side:



What a difference between the two diagrams! In the diagram of the previous page all the believers are touched by God. However, in the above diagram, **the “Special Priesthood” class comes between God and the Church!** Truly, their presence in the Christian community **undermines the wonderful and mysterious work that the Lord Jesus**

**Christ accomplished through His death and resurrection, that is, uniting God with all those who believe in Him!**

The “special priesthood” class **hinders God’s purpose for the “New Creation”**. Their claim to be needed in order to “help” those who are part of God’s new creation **to become better Christians**, undermines and blasphemes the ability and the work of God (Ephesians 2:10).

Those who are part of God’s new creation know that the need of a “special priesthood” came to an end when ***“the veil of the temple was torn into two from top to bottom”*** the day Jesus was crucified (Matthew 27:51). Since that day, all the believers have free and direct access to the presence of God through the Holy Spirit, offering to God ***“sacrifices of lips”*** without the assistance of a “special priesthood” (Hebrews 4:16; 13:15; 10:10-14).

**7.** The New Testament reveals that all those who believe and follow the True Jesus of the Bible, who is the YHWH of Psalms 68:18 (compare with Ephesians 4:8-10) make up the **“Body”** of Christ and that Jesus is the **“Head”** (Romans 12:4,5; 1 Corinthians 10:17; 12:12-27; Ephesians 1:22; 5:23).

The “special priesthood” **decapitates and separates the “Body” from its “Head”**. Look at the illustration that follows:

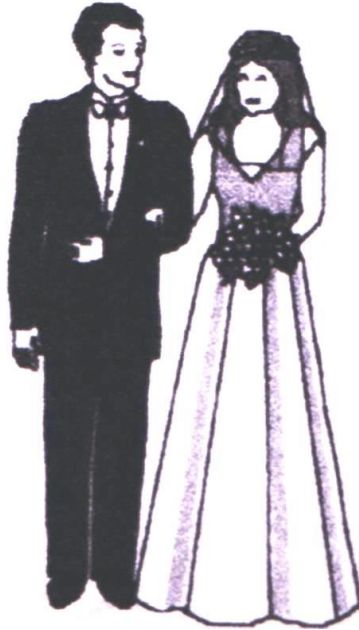
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**SPECIAL PRIESTHOOD**



8. The New Testament clearly states that Jesus is the “**Bridegroom**” and that all those who believe in Him are His “**Bride**” (2 Corinthians 11:2; Revelation 19:7). The “**special priesthood**” drives a wedge between Christ and His “**Bride**”. No bride needs “other men” in order to “help” her “improve” her personal relationship with her husband. Meditate on the illustration on the next page:



**9.** Those who believe in the True Jesus of the Bible are saved and sanctified **priests**. This reality should never be forgotten by any of His true followers (1 Peter 2:4,5,9). As a **“Holy”** people, as a **“Kingdom of priests”** they have the right, the authority to **preach**, to **teach**, to **baptize**, to **distribute the bread and the wine**, and to do everything that is part of the worship they offer to God and to Christ (Revelation 20:6). **They should not hire “special priests” to carry out the priestly responsibilities on their behalf!**

**10.** The “special priests” are guilty of a rebellion similar to Korah’s (Core’s) who wanted to take upon himself a priesthood apart from God’s arrangement, a priesthood which God had not given him (Numbers chapter 16; Jude

12). **God's arrangement today for Christians is that every believer is a priest.** As priests, they live and work for the glory of God (1 Peter 2:5; 1 Corinthians 10:31). **They do not become priests because of their own worth;** it is the grace of God that places them in this position of service based on what Christ has done. Therefore, the person who decides to separate himself and become a "special priest" apart from God's arrangement in order to act on behalf of his brothers with acts of forgiveness and offerings, usurps the priestly service of Christ and of His followers and becomes guilty of a rebellion similar to Korah's.

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*For those who speak Greek and wish a comprehensive study on the above subject, read the book, "ΒΑΣΙΛΕΙΟΝ ΙΕΡΑΤΕΥΜΑ" by Στυλ. Χαραλαμπάκη, Σολομού 4, Διόνυσος, Αττική, 14565.*