

HighLight Key – The Teacher’s Priestly Role

In this Key we look at an aspect of the Christian teacher’s role that is not often recognised. The word ‘priest’ may not register with those of us who have not experienced Anglican or Roman Catholic worship. Yet, as teachers, we have a priestly role.

What is a priest?

The priest in the Old Testament went into the presence of God to pray for the people and then came out and blessed the people with blessing from God.

So the priest is a mediator with one arm raised in petition to God and the other extending God’s blessing to the people.

How does this apply to us as teachers?

Our High Priest



We have a High Priest, Jesus, who continually intercedes for us:

Now the main point of what we are saying is this: We do have such a high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, and who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by a mere human being. (Heb. 1:1-2)

Now there have been many of those priests, since death prevented them from continuing in office; but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them. (Heb. 7:23-25)

- The priestly teacher prays for his or her children, just as our High Priest, Jesus, prays for us to the Father
- The priestly teacher interprets God’s principles in the curriculum
- Like a priest the teacher sacrifices his/her time and energy to go into God to get His revelation and interpretation in every subject
- The priestly teacher wears a spiritual ‘cloak’ of humility with an awareness of weakness

The Cloak of Humility

Jesus is an effective priest because He remembers what it is like to be a human, vulnerable to temptation. He was tempted in every way as we are.

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. (Heb. 4:14-16)

Because Jesus was tempted in every way like we are He is sympathetic and He offers us grace when we come to Him in time of need.

Likewise, we as teachers need to remember what it was like to be a pupil and to wear a 'cloak' of weakness, sympathising with our pupils' failures, temptations and sins, even though we may sometimes need to bring correction. The issue is that wearing this 'cloak' of humility keeps our hearts tender and sympathetic to our pupils' weaknesses.

We stand between God and pupils, receiving a diet from heaven, yet living in a broken universe.

We sympathise and pray for pupils from broken families or abusive parents. As teacher we become comforter, counsellor, evangelist and bible teacher.

We are gentle in dealing with ignorance and teaching a better way to respond.

He can have compassion on those who are ignorant and going astray, since he himself is also subject to weakness. (Heb. 5:2)

The Greek word used for 'ignorance' means 'untaught'.

No priest calls himself to the task. A priest must be called by God and so must we, if we are to be effective teachers, called and appointed by God to this demanding task.

In this way we have the opportunity to model to our pupils how to handle weakness, both in our lives and in dealing with them.

Our prayers will be heard by God through our 'reverent submission'.

During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. (Heb. 5:7)

This means that, like Jesus, we are to be both holy with the daily help of the Holy Spirit, and continually aware of need. We cannot be perfect but we are in a process of salvation and sanctification. Sometimes we, like Jesus, will grow tired and feel weakness and need rest.

We need to apprehend and use the gifts mentioned in Romans 12 and Colossians 3:12-17.

Colossians 3:12-17 – put on compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forgiveness and, over all, put on love.

Romans 12 – serving, teaching, giving, encouraging, prophesying (i.e. speaking God's revelation and word to pupils,) contributing, leading, governing/ruling

We have the awesome privilege of loving our pupils as those made in God's image and therefore of intrinsic value and worth to Him. We are privileged to teach them about Jesus and his love.