



EQUIPPING THE SAINTS

THE PRIESTHOOD OF EVERY BELIEVER

NOTES

Introduction

If we are discerning Christians we must, at one time or another, address the issue of our “calling” or vocation in life as a born again believer or obeyer of Jesus Christ. We must ask ourselves whether God has a specific plan for our lives, or whether we can do whatever we want to do as long as we obey God’s commandments.

People who are not diligent in their study of the Scripture and who have never addressed these issues may be bothered by verses that appear frequently in sermons of Bible-teaching pastors.

Verses like:

“He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it.”

Matthew 10:39

Then He said to them all, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.”

Luke 9:23

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

Galatians 2:20

Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.

1 Corinthians 6:19,20

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.

Romans 12:1

All these verses seem to indicate that God has designs on our lives beyond just saving us and getting us into Heaven to be with Him forever.

In our first lesson we learned that God's plan for us is that we invest our lives in the eternal things of God, and *realize* that the work of ministry is ours. In the second lesson we learned that the fulfilling of the Great Commission is the *individual responsibility* of each believer. If we are to exchange our lives for things that are eternal, we *must* be involved in the winning and discipling of people for the fulfilling of the Great Commission. We saw that by making disciples, we bring a multiplying factor into the Kingdom. The first two lessons focused on what God wants us to do. This lesson focuses on who we are, and the power and authority we have to engage in the ministry God has chosen for us.

Paul addresses this issue as he writes to Timothy.

...who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began.

2 Timothy 1:9

From this passage we learn that we have been saved and **called** to a holy **calling**, not because of any works on our part, but because of God's purpose and grace. Before the foundations of the world were ever brought into being, we were conceived in the heart and mind of God and given a calling or vocation in life. If we examine the most famous passage of Scripture, the Ten Commandments, we gain some insight as to the nature of this calling.

With only a superficial reading of the Ten Commandments we see ten separate instructions which are to guide our lives. A careful study of this passage of Scripture reveals really only two commandments. The first commandment is to love God with all your heart, mind and soul. This is what Jesus called the Great Commandment.

❶ Love God With All Your Heart, Mind And Soul

You shall have no other gods before you.

You shall not make, worship or serve any graven images.

You shall not take the Lord God's name in vain.

Six days shall thou labor; honor the Sabbath; keep it holy.

The first four commandments deal with our own personal relationship to God.

The second commandment is to love our neighbor as ourselves, which we recognize as the Great Commission. I love my lost brother and sister by sharing the Gospel and bringing them into the Kingdom. I love my saved brother and sister by bringing them to their full maturity in Christ so that the Kingdom is expanded.

② Love Your Neighbor As Yourself

Honor your father and mother.

You shall not kill.

You shall not commit adultery.

You shall not steal.

You shall not bear false witness.

You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, servant, animals or possessions.

The last six commandments have to do with our own personal relationship to other people. If we violate these commandments, we will not have a ministry to others.

In Matthew's account of Jesus' confrontation with the lawyer, Jesus confirms that there are really only two commandments.

Jesus said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."

Matthew 22:37-40

But notice carefully that it starts with our relationship to God. This is why Jesus tells us what is to have the first priority in life.

But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.

Matthew 6:33

We know Jesus' Kingdom is made up of people; He did not die for real estate, but for people. The only way I can walk with God in obedience is by being involved in the winning and discipling of those people. Jesus warns us that nothing is to have a higher priority in life.

Prerequisites

I Am Not My Own

As true followers of Christ we know that we are made in God's image and are His purchased possession. He may do anything He wants to do with us; we are not our own. All we have belongs to God. Like Jesus, we live to do our Father's will.

Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.

1 Corinthians 6:19,20

I Am to be Dead to Self

This is a difficult teaching. Many people are not willing to turn their lives over to God for Him to do whatever He wants. They want to keep **their** lives, to do **their** will and to serve God as **they** see fit. This is not what Paul had in mind when he wrote this letter to the Galatian church:

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

Galatians 2:20

I Am to be a Living Sacrifice

In an existential age, most people know nothing about being a sacrifice. We live in a theological environment of grace, and many people don't understand how hardship, suffering, difficulties and sacrifice can be a part of God's love and plan for them. In Paul's day, to sacrifice meant to take something which was alive and put it to death, offering it to the gods.

When we come to grips with this concept of not being our own, when we are willing to be a sacrifice, to be dead to self so God's will can be accomplished through our lives and bodies, then we will be vessels that God can use.

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

Romans 12:1,2

I Am to Have the Mind of Christ

Like Jesus, we are to surrender our lives to God and become His servants. We live to serve the will of our master, even as Jesus did.

“For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.”

John 6:38

Paul addressed this very same issue when he wrote his letter to the church of Philippi:

Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Philippians 2:5-11

Let this mind be in you..., Jesus took the form of a servant and placed himself in a position for God to do with Him what He had planned from the beginning.

When we willingly choose to become a bond-servant of God, each of us is assigned an objective, vocation and a place of service in His Kingdom. That vocation is to be a priest of Almighty God.

I Am to be God's Priest

This truth is set forth by God in the book of Revelation as He wrote to the seven churches of Asia.

Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Revelation 1:4-6

We have been made a Kingdom of Priests. This is our calling and true vocation as children and servants of God. We see this truth communicated again by the Spirit of God through Peter.

You also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

1 Peter 2:5

But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.

1 Peter 2:9

This is why Jesus tells us that we have been called and ordained by God.

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.

John 15:16 (KJV)

Understanding the Priesthood of the Believer

Historical Development

When sin entered the world after the fall, each man was his own priest. Cain and Abel functioned in the capacity of priests, offering their own sacrifices directly to God.

And in the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the Lord. Abel also brought of the firstlings of his flocks and of their fat. And the Lord respected Abel and his offering, but He did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell.

Genesis 4:3-5

Upon leaving the ark after the flood, Noah built an altar and offered sacrifices to God.

Then Noah built an altar to the Lord, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar.

Genesis 8:20

Abraham repeatedly offered sacrifices to God.

Then they came to the place of which God had told him. And Abraham built an altar there and placed the wood in order; and he bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, upon the wood.

Genesis 22:9

In this period of Old Testament history, **any man** in **any place** was able to act as a priest and offer his sacrifice unto God. However, at Mt. Sinai this changed.

Professional Priesthood Established

Moses was instructed to institute a professional priesthood. This brought about a major change in God's plan. Only men born to the tribe of Levi were able to perform the priestly functions. An individual layman could no longer be his own priest, taking his sacrifices directly to God. His offering and sacrifice had to be made in a designated place, and with a Levite (priest) going before God on his behalf, an arrangement which lasted for some 1500 years. In this period of history, only **special people** in **special places** could offer the sacrifice.

Historical Overview of Priesthood

When Jesus died, the curtain in the temple setting apart the Holy of Holies was torn from top to bottom, giving man direct access to the presence of God. My good friend, Walter Henrichsen, points out that the Scripture doesn't explain specifically why God tore the curtain in half, but two things stand out to an inquiring believer:

God demonstrated through the Levitical priest the inadequacy of man's effort to atone for his own sin. The repeated sacrifice of countless animals at the temple was a vivid reminder of man's futile effort to appease God for his sins.

The sacrificial system under the Levitical Order served as a picture of God's ultimate solution—Jesus Christ's death upon the cross for our sins. He died once, for all who would put their trust in Christ's finished atonement for sin.

Professional Priesthood Ends With Jesus' Death

The Levitical Order which had engineered the death of Jesus was no longer worthy to represent God to mankind or to intercede for mankind to God. The destruction of the veil, which separated the Holy of Holies from the rest of the temple, also destroyed and ended the Levitical Priesthood.

Once again the believer was free to represent himself directly to God. This is why both Jesus and Peter declared that all believers are a Kingdom of Priests, and that we are born again into a royal priest-

hood. This is why Jesus tells us that we are chosen and ordained.

NOTES

“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.”

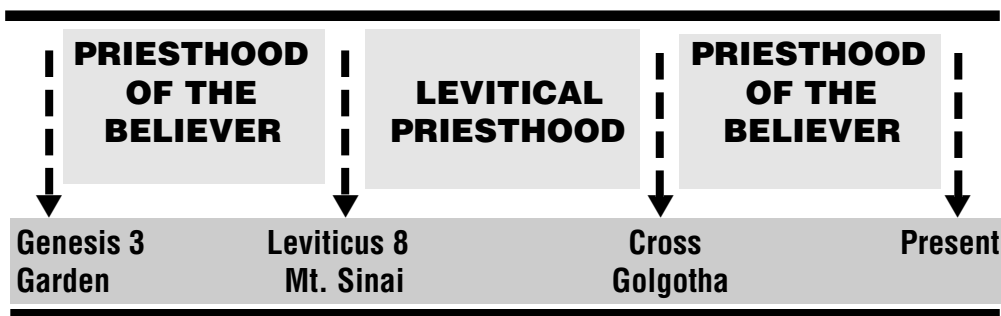
John 15:16 (KJV)

This is why the writer of the book of Hebrews admonishes us:

Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Hebrews 4:16

If Jesus is our Master and we are serving Him, we see that He has made us priests to God. Priesthood is our true vocation in life.



The Priesthood of the Believer

The Dynamics of the New Testament Church

The right and responsibility of each believer to function as a priest became a dynamic of the New Testament Church which brought explosive growth to the Church. The Church went from “adding” in Acts 2:41, to “multiplying disciples” in Acts 6:1, to “multiplying Churches” in Acts 9:31, to being accused of turning the world upside down in Acts 17:6.

The New Testament Churches were founded on the offices of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers, as well as of deacons and elders. Ephesians 4:12 tells us how these offices were to function.

And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.

Ephesians 4:11,12

These full-time workers were charged with the responsibility of perfecting the saints or the individual priests who were, in turn, charged with the work of ministry. This word “perfect” means to train, to equip, to prepare the individual priest to do the work of ministry.

In the New Testament Church there is no priesthood apart from the priesthood of the believers. None of the offices is to usurp the believer’s role or his right and responsibility to function as God’s priest. When the offices function in their New Testament pattern we see results like those spelled out in the following verses:

Till we all come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness by which they lie in wait to deceive, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

Ephesians 4:13-16

A properly functioning Church will result in unity of faith and in people growing to maturity, not being tossed to and fro by false doctrine. Every part of the Church functions so the objectives of the Great Commandment and the Great Commission are being accomplished. We see this repeatedly in the Book of Acts, where a New Testament model of maturing converts to disciples is established in Acts 2:41,42.

When the problem of the Greek widows arose in Acts 6, the Twelve didn’t have to leave their appointed roles. They simply allowed the people to choose some men to handle the matter. This was possible because all had been trained and were capable of functioning in this task. One of the men chosen was Philip. We find Philip again in Acts 8, down in Samaria preaching the Gospel. A revival broke out and the apostles up in Jerusalem sent Peter and John to help out. When God was ready to convert the Ethiopian, it was through Philip's ministry that he was won and baptized. Here was Philip carrying out his priestly function as mandated by the Great Commission without some special commission of the Twelve to do missionary work. Philip viewed wherever he was as an arena for representing Christ. He preached and baptized and was capable of doing whatever was necessary as a Priest of God. Under this order the Church of Christ penetrated the world in a very significant way.

Re-Establishment of the Levitical Order

At the end of the first century an extra-Biblical word was introduced into the vocabulary of the New Testament Church. That word was “clergy” and with it came a hierarchical distinction between laity and professional clergy. This brought about a slow and unfortunate evolutionary change which has diminished the dynamic effectiveness of the Church. At first the clergy gave direction, which grew to managing, and ultimately to controlling the laity. Eventually that change brought about a reintroduction of a “Levitical Order,” and before long the priesthood of the believer slipped into oblivion. Once the structure was in place it was easy to accept, embrace and justify it from the Old Testament pattern. The pastor came to be called the priest; the believers, laity. The communion table became an altar, and the elements, a sacrifice. People were discouraged from reading and interpreting the Bible for themselves. Bible study, along with intercession and confession, became the domain of the professional clergy. Some laity, out of apathy and laziness, were happy to surrender the responsibility and privilege of the priesthood to a professional priest. This way they could give themselves to the building of their own kingdom and allow the professionals to build God’s Kingdom on their behalf.

The purpose of this lesson is not to place blame, but to help us see that we slipped from the New Testament pattern to the Old Testament pattern. If we want to regain our effectiveness it is imperative that we restore this New Testament pattern into the lives of our people as well as the Church.

A Return to the Priesthood of the Believer

As godly men began to see and understand the change which had occurred they tried to return the Church to its New Testament pattern. At first they had little impact, but the seeds for reformation were being sown.

Waldo

One of the first men that God used to sow these seeds was Peter Waldo. A merchant from Lyons, France, he lived in the 12th Century. Waldo raised up a large following who memorized the Scriptures and set about to preach the Gospel. This movement spread to some of the surrounding countries of Spain, Italy, Germany and Bohemia. The Church branded Waldo’s followers as heretics and their efforts finally dissipated.

Wycliffe

John Wycliffe, an Englishman, translated the Bible into the language of the people. He taught that laymen could participate in the work of ministry and administer the sacraments. After his death, Wycliffe was condemned by the Church, which banned his writing, exhumed his bones, burned them and scattered his remains. This was done in an effort to destroy his dynamic influence.

Hus

John Hus, a Czech, was influenced by the writings of Wycliffe, and called for reformation of the Church to accommodate the New Testament pattern. Hus was condemned as a heretic and burned at the stake.

Luther

Not until the 16th Century did the seeds sown by reformation leaders begin to germinate. Through his study of Scripture, Martin Luther, an obscure German priest, came to many of these same conclusions. He nailed his grievances to the door in Wittenburg in 1517.

The basic tenets of the Reformation were:

- **The just shall live by faith,**
- **Priesthood of every believer,**
- **Right and responsibility of the individual to study God's Word,**
- **Involvement of the individual in the work of ministry,**
- **Direct confession to God for sin,**
- **Right of the individual to administer the sacraments.**

Martin Luther only accomplished half of the job. He reformed the doctrine of the Church without reforming the structure. Before long the restored priesthood of the believer with its accompanying rights and responsibilities once again began to fade into oblivion.

Our True Vocation in Life

We see from Scripture that the priesthood of the believer is more than a doctrine to which we pay lip service. If Jesus is our Master, our vocation is to be a priest. Avocationally, we may be doctors, lawyers, teachers, merchants, etc., but that has to do with *where* we function as priests, not *what* we are vocationally. In the Old Testament pattern some priests functioned inside the temple; others had duties outside the temple. In the New Testament Church some priests serve in the Church and some outside in the market place. On Sunday morning when the pastor steps into the pulpit he has just gone to work. On Monday when you step into your place of employment you just stepped into your pulpit. Like your pastor, God has given you a congregation where you may carry out your priestly functions.

God has beautifully scattered priests throughout the community. His plan was to surround unbelievers in a sea of priests so that everyone would not only hear the Gospel, but see it in action as the priests lived

in front of them. This allowed everyone to have the best presentation of the Gospel that was possible from priests in the family, neighborhood, on the job and everywhere the unbeliever went.

The Priest's Duties

As priests, we have a two-fold responsibility. Our first responsibility is to represent God to people in our congregation—lost or saved. To those who are lost, we represent God through the Gospel in an effort to bring them to a saving faith in Jesus Christ. To those who are our brothers and sisters, we represent God by teaching them to obey all that Jesus commanded, thereby making them disciples.

Our second responsibility is to represent the people to God by intercession. We bring the needs of our congregation to God asking for His help and mercy.

Conclusion

In many places people have never learned that they are priests. It is of little wonder that they don't:

*act like priests,
live like priests,
or carry out their priestly functions.*

Several years ago while visiting a pastor in California, I noticed a bottle of Wesson Oil in the bottom of the pulpit. I was somewhat curious about what the oil was doing in the pulpit, but I didn't say anything. Later in our conversation, when we came to the priesthood of the believer, the pastor's eyes lighted up. He told me how he taught and trained people in their responsibilities of the priesthood and how the Church had a service at which they publicly anointed people into the priesthood of the believer. He was interested in **Equipping The Saints** because he felt it would help him prepare the priests for their two-fold work of ministry.

My questions to you are:

How are you doing with your priestly function?

What kind of a priest are you?

Have you surrendered your life to serve God and become a responsible priest for Him?