

COMMUNITY

The Priesthood of all Believers

Sunday, 14 June 2020 (By Marius Gradwell)

Text:

1 Peter 2:2-5 TPT *In the same way that nursing infants cry for milk, you must intensely crave the pure spiritual milk of God's Word. For this "milk" will cause you to grow into maturity, fully nourished and strong for life— (3) especially now that you have had a taste of the goodness of the Lord Jehovah and have experienced his kindness. (4) So keep coming to him who is the Living Stone— though he was rejected and discarded by men but chosen by God and is priceless in God's sight. (5) Come and be his "living stones" who are continually being assembled into a sanctuary for God. For now you serve as holy priests, offering up spiritual sacrifices that he readily accepts through Jesus Christ*

1 Peter 2:9 TPT *But you are God's chosen treasure—priests who are kings, a spiritual "nation" set apart as God's devoted ones. He called you out of darkness to experience his marvelous light, and now he claims you as his very own. He did this so that you would broadcast his glorious wonders throughout the world.*

Let me paint a picture

There is sanctuary, a temple, the place where God dwells. No more a physical sanctuary or temple. But a spiritual temple. That is all of us, each one individually and all of us collectively.

1 Corinthians 6:19 ESV *Or do you not know that your (Singular) body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own,*

1 Corinthians 3:16-17 ESV *Do you not know that you (Plural) are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? (17) If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.*

Because we have tasted the goodness of God and experienced His kindness, we come to Him, who is the Living Stone. (verse 3)

As we come to Him, we receive life and become living stones ourselves, and He forms us into a sanctuary, a temple where God dwells. (a beautiful picture of the community we are becoming, God's House, God's Family) (verses 4 + 5)

In this sanctuary we serve as priests.

This sounds like Old Testament language when we speak about "Temple" and "Priests". But that was the shadow of the real thing! Old Testament activities picture New Testament realities.

Hebrews 8:5 NLT *They serve in a system of worship that is only a copy, a shadow of the real one in heaven. For when Moses was getting ready to build the Tabernacle, God gave him this warning: "Be sure that you make everything according to the pattern I have shown you here on the mountain."*

Hebrews 8:10-11 NLT *But this is the new covenant I will make with the people of Israel on that day, says the LORD: I will put my laws in their minds, and I will write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. (11) And they will not need to teach their neighbours, nor will they need to teach their relatives, saying, 'You should know the LORD.' For everyone, from the least to the greatest, will know me already.*

Today we are going to have a closer look at what it means to be a New Testament priest. (A living stone in a spiritual community, where God dwells)

Our Mission is to advance God's Kingdom. We are doing this individually and collectively. Wherever we are deployed. We do this by living the way Jesus showed us to live (that is what it means to be a disciple of Jesus) and we do this by influencing others by the Gospel we proclaim (sharing the Good News). We promote and demonstrate this Gospel by our everyday living – that is what it means to be a disciple-maker.

When we look at the coming harvest of souls, we realise that we are not even close to ready to handle what is coming.

We need to do what Jesus intended.

Ephesians 4:11-16 TPT *And he has appointed some with grace to be apostles, and some with grace to be prophets, and some with grace to be evangelists, and some with grace to be pastors, and some with grace to be teachers. (12) And their calling is to nurture and prepare all the holy believers to do their own works of ministry, and as they do this they will enlarge and build up the body of Christ. (13) These grace ministries will function until we all attain oneness in the faith, until we all experience the fullness of what it means to know the Son of God, and finally we become one perfect man with the full dimensions of spiritual maturity and fully developed in the abundance of Christ. (14) And then our immaturity will end! And we will not be easily shaken by trouble, nor led astray by novel teachings or by the false doctrines of deceivers who teach clever lies. (15) But instead we will remain strong and always sincere in our love as we express the truth. All our direction and ministries will flow from Christ and lead us deeper into him, the anointed Head of his body, the church. (16) For his "body" has been formed in his image and is closely joined together and constantly connected as one. And every member has been given divine gifts to contribute to the growth of all; and as these gifts operate effectively throughout the whole body, we are built up and made perfect in love.*

We must realise the reality of the priesthood of every believer – every Christian mobilised in their spheres of influence, and beyond.

Illustration: A mule being the offspring of a male donkey and a female horse generally cannot reproduce itself. Therefore, it is not easy to make a lot of mules. The way we have been doing things . . . is it easy to make a lot of Christians? We can no longer afford to have "sterile" Christians. We maintain and sustain church health, and advance God's kingdom by multiplying ourselves, each one of us must be training and equipping disciple-makers who are training and equipping disciple-makers.

The priesthood of every believer must cause such an empowering shift in our church, everyone fully empowered, supported and sent, duplicates itself, advances the Kingdom, and thereby changes the world.

The doctrine of the priesthood of all believers states that all believers in Christ share in His priestly status; therefore, there is no special class of people who mediate the knowledge, presence, and forgiveness of Christ to the rest of believers, and all believers have the right and authority to enter God's presence and to read, interpret, and apply the teachings of Scripture for themselves.

The doctrine of the priesthood of all believers opposes the unbiblical doctrine of sacerdotalism and the existence of a priestly class within the church.

Definition of *sacerdotalism* – is the religious belief emphasising the powers of priests as essential mediators between God and humankind

When Martin Luther posted his Ninety-five Theses on the door of the Castle Church of Wittenberg on 31st October 1517, he was declaring war against the idea that salvation was mediated through the church priesthood via the sacraments. **Luther insisted that everyone who trusts in Jesus Christ is a priest.**

The concept that all who believe in Christ are priests occurred to Luther after he became convinced that Scripture was the only authority for a Christian. As he studied the Bible, especially Paul's Epistle to the Romans, he discovered that in and through Jesus Christ a believer possessed the righteousness of God, and therefore, immediate access to God without the mediation of an arrogant priesthood. Thus, the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers is a sequel to the doctrine of justification by grace alone through faith alone.

Those who are clothed in the perfect righteousness of God are welcome in the presence of God.

No Christian needs a bridge builder because Jesus Christ alone is the way to the Father. The difference between sacerdotalism and Reformation theology is seen when we ask the question "What must I do to be saved?" The Roman Catholic church would answer, "Look to the priesthood and the church." But the Bible says: "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31).

The sacrificial death of Jesus Christ annulled the Aaronic priesthood, as we read in Hebrews. There is no need to continue offering up blood sacrifices. As the perfect Son of God and High Priest, Jesus established a new covenant (Heb. 9:15-22) with better promises (Heb. 8:6) when he offered himself (Heb. 7:27) as the perfect victim once for all as our substitute (Heb. 7:27) and ransom (Heb. 9:15). By his death he took away our sins (Heb. 9:28), made us perfect (Heb. 10:14), obtained for us eternal redemption (Heb. 9:12), opened a new and living way in and through him to God's throne of grace, and sat down at the right hand of God (Heb. 10:12). He now invites every believer with a clean conscience (Heb. 9:14) to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus (Heb. 10:19) to offer continually spiritual sacrifices (Heb. 13:15, 16) as priests in Christ.

In our one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus, Christians come immediately and directly to God. They have no further need for any fallible human priest, whether Roman Catholic or evangelical. In Christ they are set free from all slavery and granted the dignity of a royal priesthood. As God's elect, believers have been given new birth into a living hope by the

resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 1:3, 23). As living stones who trust in the living foundation stone, Jesus Christ, they are built into a new spiritual temple.

There is no difference among believers, as Paul writes, "*There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.*" (Gal. 3:28-29).

Discussion Question:

Now that you know that you are a new covenant Priest, how do you interpret this scripture?



Pause/Play

2 Corinthians 5:17-20 ESV Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. (18) All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; (19) that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. (20) Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

The ministry of the church is not a one-man ministry. Everyone is given grace, everyone is a priest, and everyone must serve God as a priest together with all others. A New Testament congregation is like an orchestra in which all participate in the service of God decently and in order. You are not a spectator.

So, being a priest means that us all are equal and have direct access to God without the need for ecclesiastical (church) mediation.

This is a key element of the collective identity of the people of God. Be careful not to make a subtle move in practice and make a distinction between the *general priesthood* and the *special priesthood* to the inevitable *priesthood of the ordained*.

I am convinced that the New Testament did not intend to create the clergy-laity divide that we find in many churches (and mindsets) today.

This by no means implies that there are no leadership roles in the church. Rather, it means that every believer in the community is a full-time minister of the Gospel, set apart for ministry.

We need to move from *Christendom Ecclesiology* to *Missional Ecclesiology*.

In *Christendom Ecclesiology*, people naturally go to "church" on Sunday. Hence, an emphasis on pastoral concerns, good preaching, and teaching, in functional buildings, effective in nurturing people and influencing culture.

Christendom ecclesiology serves this attractational ministry model well, except for some obvious drawbacks. It contributes to creating a dichotomy within the Church between those who do and those who do not, those who serve and those who are served. It reinforced the clergy-laity divide and produce teams of ministers serving spectator congregations.

Missional ecclesiology puts its emphasis more on the missional incarnational ministries of the church, a church where every member view himself or herself as a minister and as a missionary to

their context in their various spheres of influence. The emphasis is no longer on buildings or internal concerns. The Church gathers regularly to worship, to fellowship, and to be equipped for ministry, and then disperses into the world to serve.

A key element to *ecclesiology* is leadership. Who are the leaders of the Church? What is their function? Are they the ministers, or are they the equippers/coaches? The answers to these questions have a significant impact on shaping the ministry of the Church.

The normal practice for most local assemblies today is the "one pastor" structure with the focal point of "ministry" surrounding this one man. The "pastor" is viewed as the professional ("clergy") who has some type of special "calling" of God and thereby possesses a holy and unique status as compared to the others ("laity") in the local body. As a result, the local church becomes a "spectator church".

In this setting, the "laity" will only sit, listen, sing, and pray while the "pastor" or paid staff does most everything else in the local body. Not only is this unbiblical but it also denies every *member* ministry of the New Covenant priesthood.

Therefore, no one person can be known as "the minister" in the church. The New Covenant structure of the local church does not focus on one part (the pastor) of the body but on mutual ministry from all believers.

Jon Zens captures how the New Covenant priesthood is to function:

There is no evidence anywhere in the New Testament for the primacy of *one man's gifts*. There is evidence 58 times in the New Testament for the importance of *mutual care and multiple gifts*: "love one another... admonish one another... edify one another... comfort one another... forgive one another... give to one another... pray for one another." Why are our churches marked by obvious emphasis on "the pastor," but very little--if any--concern for the cultivation of *mutual relationships*? *We have exalted that for which there is no evidence, and neglected that for which there is abundant evidence*. We are used to pawning off our responsibilities on someone else. We want the church to minister *to us*, but we think very little as to how *we* can minister to the needs of others. God has given spiritual gifts to the leaders of the Church for the primary purpose of equipping the members to do the work of ministry.

Some will contend that the Bible does not present a specific pattern of church government which is binding upon the local church for all times and places. However, Scripture gives us only one model for church government. This structure is plural eldership (shared leadership). There is *no* example in the New Testament of a local church ruled by one leader.

All elders have equal authority and share equal responsibility for leadership in the local assembly.

Shared leadership promotes the New Covenant priesthood through manifesting Christ as the true and only head of the church.

Elders, then, are *part of* the New Covenant priesthood and not *the* priesthood. They serve to equip each believer to function in their Priesthood.



Pause/Play

Discussion Question:

Our church has moved away from a “one man – senior pastor” leadership to shared leadership (plural eldership).

How does this set an example to you to be the minister God has called you to be?

Conclusion

1 Peter 2:4-5 TPT *So keep coming to him who is the Living Stone—though he was rejected and discarded by men but chosen by God and is priceless in God's sight. (5) Come and be his “living stones” who are continually being assembled into a sanctuary for God. For now you serve as holy priests, offering up spiritual sacrifices that he readily accepts through Jesus Christ.*

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