

The Priesthood of Believers

by Gerry Covenhoven

The priesthood of all believers is a doctrine that teaches every Christian has the authority and responsibility to serve God and others as a priest, with no distinction between clergy and laity.

Duration: 46:28

Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 2:1

Topics: "Christian Priesthood", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the concept of priesthood and its significance in the Christian faith. He emphasizes that believers are called to be priests and serve others, just as Jesus did. The speaker references various Bible verses, including John 13, 1 Peter 2, and Revelation 1, to support his points. He also highlights the importance of spiritual growth and the offering of spiritual sacrifices to God.

Transcript

Good morning. Well, I may need to cut me a little bit short, as I went well over time, so tonight I'm just cutting this part short and hoping I won't go over time. Let's read from 1 Peter, chapter 2, verses 1 through 10.

1 Peter, chapter 2, verses 1 through 10. Our subject this evening is our spiritual priesthood. I trust that the Lord will show us some things that can be appropriate to us, each one individually, proceeding from his word.

1 Peter, chapter 2, verses 1 through 10. Wherefore, laying aside all malice, and all guile, and apostasies, and envies, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire to secure most of the word that ye may grow thereby. If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious.

For whom coming as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God and precious, be also as lively stones are built up a spiritual house and holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. Wherefore, also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Brian a two-cornered stone, elect, precious, and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded. Unto you, therefore, which believe, he is precious.

But unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, that thing is made the head of the corner, and the stone of trembling, and a rock of offense, even to them which tremble at the word,

being disobedient, for unto also they were appointed. But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, and holy nation, a peculiar people, that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light, which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God, which have not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy." Some time ago we dealt with light in the spirit of God, seeking to show some of the avenues in which that fullness of the spirit of God could and could be manifested in our lives, and we were dealing in deep with the idea of worshipping in the spirit as is given to us in Philippians chapter 3. We notice there that worshipping in the spirit involves not simply worshipping, because that word has a dual meaning to it and is sometimes translated serving in the spirit. It is actually true service that is involved, and so that it involves not only worshipping but serving as well.

Now, the priesthood of all believers is a doctrine that is fairly well known amongst Christian believers today, and certainly it's taught in the word of God very particularly in the New Testament. But I don't know when it happened that in the history of the Church they began to get away from it until finally with Roman Catholicism when it came about that there was a certain chosen group of men, the so-called clergy, in distinction from the laity, and they were the only ones who were recognized as priests in that system. But then when the Reformation came along, there were four cardinal points of the Reformation under Luther.

The first one was Scripture alone. The second one was faith alone. The third one was grace alone.

And the fourth one was the priesthood of all believers. And so from that time forward, the priesthood of all believers has at least in theory been accepted by almost all so-called Protestants, or even John the Baptist. But at the same time, even in Protestantism, there are some such as the Anglican Church and the Church of England that still classify their ministers as priests of a special order in distinction from the priesthood of the rank-and-file of the believers in the Churches.

Now, the Word of God doesn't show any distinction between one kind of priest or another kind of priest as far as the New Testament priesthood is concerned. In the Old Testament, God's original plan was, as He chose Israel out of Egypt, led them forth, and we read in Exodus chapter 19 before God gave the Ten Commandments, it was His original plan that the whole nation would be a kingdom of priests under Him. But we know that because of the sin of the golden calf that entered in, the nation as such was rejected, and because of the fact that in that sin of the golden calf, when Moses came down from the mount, found them in that book, the Tables of the Law, and he said, Who is on the Lord's side? The whole tribe of Levi, the tribe to which Moses pertained, they trembled and fell to Him, and Moses said, Take every man his sword, and blow throughout the camp, and slay everyone who has been engaged in this idolatrous worship.

So they gave, and the result was then the tribe of Levi was chosen for the priesthood, while the remainder of them were rejected for the priesthood. But God's original purpose, we repeat, was that all of the people of God be priests, and this is just what we find here in 1 Peter. Now, we would like to notice a little bit, first, the fact of our universal priesthood as it is given to us in the New Testament.

It is the New Testament particularly that brings this out, and we find that it's not only here in 1 Peter. We find also the Apostle Paul speaking about our priesthood. We find the Apostle John speaking about our priesthood.

We find the writers of the letters of the Hebrews speaking about this priesthood. So we would like to briefly deal with these things. First of all, Peter, that we've been reading here in chapter 2, you notice in verse 5 he says, We also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house and holy priesthood to offer up spiritual

sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.

Here he's speaking of holy priesthood, and he emphasizes that this holy priesthood is in order to present spiritual sacrifices to God by Jesus Christ. So this aspect of our priesthood, called here our spiritual priesthood then, is God-worthy. It looks upward.

But then in verse 9 he speaks of another aspect of our priesthood, and he says, But we are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood. Here, a royal priesthood in distinction to the holy priesthood of verse 5, and he goes on to say, And holy nation, a peculiar people, that we should show forth the praises of him that hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. And notice here that this royal priesthood is to show forth the marvels of God, and this emphasizes then that the royal priesthood has to do with the people around us.

It is as we serve others. Holy priesthood is God-worthy. It is vertical.

Royal priesthood is manward, and is horizontal. And so these two aspects of our priesthood, then, would emphasize the, first of all, God-ward aspect of it, as we would, for instance, come together and worship Lord Satan morning. In our worship we are engaging in a holy priesthood.

But then as we go out to the world and testify to them and teach us truth, then in various ways this is a part of our royal priesthood as we serve them in and around us. Now, that Paul speaks of this holy priesthood and this royal priesthood, I don't think we need to turn to it, but in 1 Corinthians chapter 11, where he refers to the Lord's Supper, that which he had received from the Lord, how the Lord, the night that he was betrayed, instituted that Lord's Supper, and took those emblems and said, Do this in remembrance of me. There he is speaking about an exercise of that holy priesthood that you and I have.

And in chapter 14 of 1 Corinthians, verse 26, he says, "How is it then, brethren, when ye become together, every one of you hath a psalm, a doctrine, a revelation, something to contribute to the meeting?" Now, then, 26 of this, there is involved in this not only the Lord's Supper aspect of that meeting of believers. Now, let me make this clear. 1 Corinthians 11, of course, is talking there about the Lord's Supper, but as we move into chapters 12, 13 and 14, he's not confining himself to the Lord's Supper aspect, but to a general meeting of believers, which includes the Lord's Supper, it includes ministry, it includes prayer, it includes anything else.

So that there he's speaking, then, of this freedom of the believers to participate in the meeting, so that anyone can have a psalm, can participate in prayer, can participate in different ways. Now, that in the first place, we can all participate on the basis of our priesthood, so that in our priesthood there is no distinction between one and the other, so that one can pray, or another can pray, or another can pray. One can give thanks for the cup, or another can give thanks for the cup.

It doesn't make any difference, because they are all equal as priests before the Lord. But something that we need to distinguish that is not equal amongst believers, and sometimes we confuse these matters, is the matter of gifts. Different believers have different gifts, and according to the gifts, then, one can participate in one way, and should not participate in another way, in use of gifts.

Now, then, as far as praying goes, anyone could do that, because this does not require gifts. As far as general participation in the Lord's Supper goes, this does not require gifts. But, then, to preach the gospel requires a gift, to teach the Word requires a gift, to exercise the function of a prophet in the church

requires a gift.

And these are distinct from one from the other, so that one could do one thing and couldn't do the other for the lack of gifts in the other. And yet, the Lord's Supper is not based upon gifts, but is based upon priesthood. And one thing that we sought to emphasize in the assemblies in Peru was that whenever we would go out to a village and seek to establish an assembly, we would emphasize that they should, among one of the first things that they would do, meet together for the Lord's Supper.

Because to celebrate the Lord's Supper did not require gifts. They didn't have to have any gifts developed for the Lord's Supper. All they had to do was recognize their position as priests, and as priests they could take part there in the Lord's Supper, read a portion of Scripture if they wanted to, have prayers, sing some hymns, and things of this nature, and participate even without any exposition of the Word.

So then you could always have the Lord's Supper, even in the feeble rest of congregation, even where there's the greatest lack of gifts. You could always celebrate the Lord's Supper. And the Apostle Paul then deals with the Lord's Supper there in post creation.

But then in Romans 15, verse 16, is a very interesting verse. Actually, the significance in this verse is lost in our King James Version, but other versions bring out what is involved here. Romans chapter 15 and verse 16.

Paul says, "...that I should be the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Ghost." This phrase, "...ministering the gospel of God," is actually, the word translated, "...ministering," is a priestly word. And as in the Berkeley Version, it says, "...serving as a priest." The margin of the American Standard Version says the same thing. Gandhi's Version, I was looking up this afternoon, and a number of others, in different words, convey a sacred ministry and the idea of there being a priestly service involved in this particular idea.

Now, this was ministering to the Gentiles, that he might be able to present them to God. But that ministering to the Gentiles, in a priestly service to the Gentiles, is that aspect of our royal priesthood. Not the holy priesthood, but a royal priesthood that is involved.

So then, Paul, in 1 Corinthians, deals with our holy priesthood, speaking about the Lord's Supper, and here in Romans 15, 15, we deal with our royal priesthood in ministering as a priest to others. Then we write it to the Hebrews. Hebrews chapter 10, of course, a beautiful portion that is dear to all of our hearts, I know, speaks of that access that we have to God's presence.

And putting it back into that Old Testament background that is really the background of all of Hebrews, Hebrews is simply taking those Old Testament rituals and everything else, and showing how we have the fulfillment, the completion of these things in our New Testament Christianity. So that here in Hebrews chapter 10, beginning at verse 19, he says, "...having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus." Now, entering into the holiest, well, it was only the priest that could enter into the holiest, and actually, it was only the high priest once a year who could enter into the holiest of all. Now then, in the book, the letter to the Hebrews, sometimes we find the word the holiest, and actually it does not distinguish in the letter to the Hebrews between the holy place and the holiest of all.

Because as far as the writer to the Hebrews is concerned, there is no distinction. It is all one, the veil has been rent. So that we have access into the very presence of God.

And this, of course, is the exercise of our holy priesthood. And then turning over to chapter 13, we find first of all again this holy priesthood. Chapter 13 of Hebrews, and verse 15, he says, "...by him," that is, by Jesus Christ, "...therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually," that is the fruit of our lips, "...giving thanks to his name." And here is first of all the holy priesthood as we praise our God.

But then verse 16, "...but to do good and to communicate, forget not. For with such sacrifices God is well pleased," and here is the exercise of our royal priesthood, doing good, communicating in material things to our fellow men. This is the royal priesthood serving others that are around us.

And then, of course, the Apostle John in the last book of the Bible, Revelation chapter 1, verses 5 and 6, he says, "...and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness and the first forgotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth, unto him that loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and our Father. To him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen." He's made us priests.

Chapter 5 says the same thing, verses 9 and 10, "...and they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book and to open the seals thereof, for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred and tongue and people and nation, and hast made us unto our God kings and priests, and we shall reign on the earth." We have been made priests. Now then, John doesn't even explain it. This was written by the end of the first century, and the idea and the concept and all that was involved in the priesthood of believers was so well established by the time that John writes the Revelation, God says, we don't have to add anything more to what is involved in priesthood.

Just mention the fact, that's all that you need to do here in the last book of the Bible, and it'll be enough just to emphasize the fact that all of God's people are priests. To be priests, we don't need any special education. To be priests, we don't need any special robe.

To be priests, we don't need any of the paraphernalia that certain liturgical churches will use. All we need to do is be redeemed by the precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, and we are automatically constituted then priests unto God. Priests who exercise then this holy priesthood and this royal priesthood for our God.

Now then, as we mentioned at the very beginning, it was John's purpose and intention that all of Israel be priests unto him, but he had to change that because of their sin, and it resulted in only the Levites being able to engage in priestly function. But in the Old Testament, there is a great development of priestly work, and I believe that from the Old Testament, in this priestly work, we can find some things that can be very palpable to us. Now, we recognize, of course, that in the Old Testament, in the ritual of the Old Testament, particularly, we have to look behind the symbolism.

We have to look behind these things and see now what do they mean to us? What is the lesson that these pictures convey to us? And that is what we would like to do this evening because I believe that they present to us something concerning our responsibilities that are involved in priesthood, and some of the things that fall upon us that we should be concerned about to see that our priesthood is of this character and this type such as we see developed in the Old Testament scriptures. Now then, first of all, in Exodus chapter 29, God tells Moses what they should do when they get to Tabernacle Completed and they've

made the robes and the special clothing that the priests are going to use, and how they should go about then consecrating the priests for the service that they were to be engaged in in the tabernacle. So that in Leviticus chapter 8, there we find the actual act of consecration.

The tabernacle has been filled, and they go ahead then and fulfill what God tells them to do in Exodus chapter 29. We won't bother to read these chapters or even one of these chapters because they're rather lengthy and there's a lot of detail, but there are some lessons there that we would just like to bring out through you. First of all, we notice there in these chapters that it is always the fact that in the Old Testament Aaron is a type of the Lord Jesus Christ because he was a high priest.

And the letters of the Hebrews present Jesus Christ now as our high priest. And Aaron's sons then were to serve as priests with him. And the only reason that they were able to serve as priests was because they were identified with Aaron.

It was their relationship to Aaron himself that enabled them to carry on as priests. There were others of the tribe of Levi that could engage in certain priestly functions and yet not being fully priests. The Levites of other families, none of the family of Aaron, could not serve any actual sacrifices on things of this nature in the tabernacle.

They could engage in other types of work around the tabernacle. But the sons of Aaron then, because of their identity with Aaron himself, it gave them that right to be priests. And we can say the same for us.

Our right to be priests usually hinges upon the fact that we are identified with and joined to the Lord Jesus Christ. He is our high priest. But then, when it came to the time of their consecration, and consecrating them through this ceremony then to the work that God gave them, first of all, they had to wash themselves completely with water.

Now, we know that the washing of water in the Word is a very clear and distinct type of being washed in the Word of God. The Word of God acting as a cleansing agent upon us as washing us and cleansing us then from all that we need, from all of our uncleanness of which we need to be cleansed. So that these priests then, in washing themselves completely with water, would be consecrating themselves to that work in that initial step in the consecration ceremony, in that way.

Now, then the Lord Jesus Christ, you remember the night before he was betrayed in John chapter 13, he comes, he takes the labor, and he's going to wash his disciples' feet. And when he gets to Peter, Peter says, Oh Lord, he says, I won't let you wash my feet. And Peter says, If I don't wash your feet, you have no part with me.

And Peter says, Well, if that's the way, Lord, just wash me all over. Peter goes from one extreme to the other, doesn't he? He's a delightful character. And he says, Just wash me all over.

And the Lord then corrects him on this. He says, Peter, He that is saved doesn't need anything but simply an occasional wash. That is, from washing the feet, the hands, the things that get dirty in the common, everyday activity of things, that these do need to be washed from time to time.

Because there has been a complete bathing previously, so that you don't need anything else. Well, that complete bathing previously will be that regeneration through the word of God that Peter has experienced, and that you and I, by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, have already experienced. So this, then, is the first step in being consecrated through our priesthood, shall we say.

Regeneration through the word of God, giving us a complete cleansing. But then they had a number of sacrifices there. A bull and two rams, and the second ram that they were to offer, the blood of this ram was to be taken.

Moses applied it to Aaron, and then Aaron applied this to his son, and took the blood of the ram and applied it first to the lobe of the right ear, to the thumb of the right hand, and to the big toe of the right foot. Now, there was a further step in that consecration ceremony in order that they be presented and participate, then, in their priesthood. The blood, of course, speaks of the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And it speaks of the Lord Jesus Christ being applied to our ear in order that we might hear his voice. No one that does not hear, anyone that does not hear the voice of God speaking to him cannot serve as a Christian. We must hear that voice.

That voice must come home to our souls. And I think that this is something that we should seek to exercise ourselves towards. As we read the word of God, do we really hear his voice? Or are we simply opening God's book, of course, but reading it as though it were any other book? Or does God speak to us from the book? We've got to hear God's voice.

And this is essential. And this consecrating blood upon our ear makes us capable of hearing God's voice. Thank God he makes us capable, then, to hear his voice in order that we might serve in his priesthood.

But then applying the blood to the right thumb means that then their service was dedicated to him. What they were going to do was to be dedicated to God. God had redeemed them for service.

And that hand, then, the thumb being dedicated to the Lord involving the whole hand, meaning that then they were to be engaged in service for him. And that blood, then, also being applied to the big toe. It means that they were to walk with the Lord in the value of that redeeming blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, as far as we are concerned now in applying that hand.

So here is the second step, then, that I see that is important for us in this consecration ceremony. First of all, there was the washing of the complete body as it was regenerated through the word of God. Secondly, there is applying of the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ to the ear to hear God's voice, to the thumb to labor for God, to the toe to walk with God.

Then, after that, there was to take blood and oil, and this was to be sprinkled upon them. Blood and oil sprinkled upon them. Here, of course, the blood is again the value of the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ applied to them totally.

And Peter speaks of the sprinkling of the blood, does he not? In 1 Peter chapter 1, he speaks of that sprinkling of the blood. Well, can you? There is also the oil, and the oil being a symbol of the Holy Spirit of God, that it is only as the value of these things are applied to us that we can then finally engage in this active service for the Lord and as we realize the value of the sprinkling of the blood and of the Holy Spirit of God in our lives so that we can truly worship in the Spirit as we considered on a previous occasion. So there is this consecration ceremony, and it would all tie in with what the Apostle Paul says in Romans chapter 12, verse 1, I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present to a body the living sacrifice wholly acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

Now, there again, this word service is the word which means a priestly service. It's your reasonable priestly service, your reasonable... The word that drove me here just slipped my mind just now, but it's

something, the idea of... It's your reasonable worship. That is the idea of the priest engaging in it on the basis of consecration.

Now, that's what we learned from that consecration ceremony there in Exodus 29 and Leviticus 8. So then, in the exercise of our New Testament priesthood, we can learn these lessons from the Old Testament that I think would be important for us. Now then, there is something else. And that is the need for holiness in the exercise of our priesthood.

Now then, may I say this, that the exercise of our priesthood is at all times excellent because we are always before the Lord and we are to be always engaged in service to the Lord. But in its relation, let us consider, first of all, what we read in Hebrews chapter 12 as to the Church of the Firstborn. Hebrews chapter 12, verses 22 and 23.

The General Assembly and Church of the Firstborn which are written in heaven. The General Assembly and Church of the Firstborn which are written in heaven. Now, what does that phrase mean to you? The General Assembly and Church of the Firstborn which are written in heaven.

To me, that is just to state it in one word or two words, the Church. It is simply the Church of our Lord Jesus Christ composed of all redeemed believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, and we are here classified as the Church of the Firstborn. Now, what we're trying to get at is this.

In the Old Testament, where, of course, it teaches originally about the Firstborn, it shows that the Firstborn, as Firstborn, has a triple inheritance. Eric Zauer brings this out in one of his books. He shows where the first thing that the Firstborn receives is that he is second in the praise of his father as head of the family, and when the father passes away, the Firstborn becomes head of the family.

Then secondly, the Firstborn receives a double portion of the inheritance. In Jacob's family, for instance, where he had 12 sons, the Firstborn, the inheritance would be divided up to the 13 parts so that the Firstborn would receive two parts and all the other 11 sons would receive one part each. So, the Firstborn receives a double portion.

And then the third thing about this inheritance of the Firstborn is that he was to be the priest of the family. So, there would be two things. First of all, to be the head of the family, to make decisions for the family.

Secondly, to receive a double portion of the inheritance, and thirdly, to be the priest of the family. Now then, as God chose Israel, well, now, let's not do that. In Jacob's family, for instance, who was his Firstborn? Reuben.

He was the Firstborn of Jacob. But Reuben, because of sin, was rejected, and we read in Genesis chapter 29 when Jacob, rather, pronounces the blessing of having 12 sons, he says, Reuben, you are my Firstborn, the beginning of my strength. But you are as unstable as water, and you shall not escape.

Jacob never forgot the time that Reuben sinned. And Reuben didn't confess it. Reuben, you know, his father didn't approve him for it, according to the Old Testament account.

And Reuben thought, well, I got away with it. But he caught up with it in the end. He lost the privilege of the Firstborn.

And then Simeon and Levi were the next two in line, but because of sin in their life, they did not receive any privilege of the Firstborn. Judah was the fourth, and Judah received, then, the part as head of the family, so that the scepter was not to depart from Judah, and the king came from Judah, and the Messiah came from Judah. And then that job of priesthood was given to the tribe of Levi because of their faithfulness, as we already mentioned.

But here in Hebrews, looking in chapter 12 again, notice verses 15 and 16. Hebrews chapter 12, verses 15 and 16. It says, "...looking diligently, lest any man fail of the grace of God, lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled, lest there be any fornicator or profane person as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright." Now, Esau, as a profane person, sold his birthright because we remember that when Jacob had a pot of lentils and Esau came in from the field hungry, absolutely starving, feeling that he couldn't last any longer without something to eat, and he saw that, he said, And Jacob says, And Esau says, And so Jacob said, And so he was a profane person desiring material things, food for his belly, instead of a birthright that would be a spiritual blessing from God, as well as a blessing from his Father.

So that he was a profane person, but the Bible never tells us that he was a fornicator, as this verse mentions. But that man whom we have already mentioned, Reuben, lost his birthright because he was a fornicator. And I believe that he is the one that is in the background here.

So that the Old Testament shows us two men who lost their birthright. Reuben, because he was a fornicator, and Esau, because he was a profane man. And this brings us to this.

Our birthright, then, as priests of God, this is a part of our birthright, as priests of God, we have got to live in holiness if we are to be able to emphasize this priesthood as we should, and be able to enter into the enjoyment of it as we should. Otherwise, we will not enter into any of the blessings of the birthright that John has for us. So that here in Hebrews, there is a very definite warning, I believe, in this relation of the Christian's birthright, and that we need to walk in holiness if we are to be able to exercise our priesthood in a proper way.

Then there is another thing that we come across in the Old Testament, and that is the necessity of distinguishing between that which is holy and that which is unclean. Look at Eccles chapter 10, beginning at verse 1. Leviticus chapter 10, beginning at verse 1. And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the Lord, which he commanded them not. And there went out fire from the Lord, and devoured them, and they died before the Lord.

Verse 8, And the Lord spake unto Aaron, saying, Do not drink wine nor strong drink, thou nor thy sons with thee, when ye go into the tabernacle of the congregation, lest ye die. It shall be a statute for ever throughout your generation, and that ye may put difference between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean, and that ye may keep the children of Israel, all the statutes which the Lord hath spoken unto them by the hand of Moses. Now, we've got to tie these two parts together.

The beginning of the chapter where Nadab and Abihu will claim before the Lord because they offered strange fire, and then the prohibition for drinking any strong drink before they were going to enter into the presence of the Lord, because strong drink will take away the ability to distinguish between that which is of God and that which is not of God. Now, God had ordered that any time a priest entered into his presence there in the holy place, not the holiest of all, but into the holy place, and they were going to carry their

senses with them, they had to take coal from off the altar where they offered their sacrifices, and then put their incense on those coals. Now, then, where these priests got their coals of fire from, we don't know.

But they evidently were not coals from the altar. So they offered strange fire. Because they were not able to distinguish and to discern these things in their at least semi-drunken state.

There's a tremendous lesson in this statistic. It seems to be far removed from us today as far as the immediate application is concerned, but the Apostle Paul has to apply it to the Corinthians. And in that chapter that we refer to, it says something in chapter 11, speaking about the Lord's Supper, he just says, when did you come together? Why did you not remember the Lord's Supper? He was reproving them.

He was saying they were doing it in the wrong way. Why? He says, because those of you who have plenty, you drink all of your wine and your food and whatnot, and you don't share with everybody else, and you drink too much wine, and you get drunk, and then you are participating in the Lord's Supper in a drunken state. So that instead of being able to distinguish in the Lord's body, as they were remembering these things in the emblem, they did not discern the Lord's body, and they were drunk because of this, and the Apostle Paul says that because of this, many are sickly, and some sleep.

God's judgment has come in amongst them. But brethren, even though we may not have this danger of not distinguishing because of drunkenness insofar as intoxicating alcoholic drinks may be concerned, there is always the tendency to become intoxicated with some of the ideas of the world. And I believe that many churches, very especially liturgical churches, depend upon strange fire in order to promote worship.

Incense, beautiful organ music, beautiful sanctuary, as they say, priestly robes, special pictured windows, and things of this nature that they depend upon, and many people feel in a much more worshipful attitude because they're in that type of an atmosphere. Now that is not pictured worship. That is worship after the flame.

That is worship according to strange fire. I remember one time a missionary in South America, not Peru, but from another Latin American country, was telling me that they wanted to have a portable hall built to be able to have gospel meetings in different villages. And so they made a kind of a temporary design as to what they thought it should look like and submitted this to an architect.

And the architect looked at this and it was explained to him what it was to be used for. And he says, oh, he says, you can't have a flat ceiling. He says, it should be a peak ceiling because he says that elevates the person's spirit to God.

Well, you see, he was a Roman Catholic architect, of course. He had this idea. Well, now, I'm not saying, of course, that it's wrong to build a chapel with a peak ceiling, but you can see what his thinking was in having a peak ceiling, that that would be much better for a place of worship than having a flat ceiling because it would elevate a person's spirit to God.

Well, all of this is a same thing. And they talk a little bit about the same thing, that we might not become intoxicated with the ideas of the world and be engaged in sin, fire, worship. Now then, turning over to Ezekiel, where also we read about worship.

In chapter 44 of Ezekiel, God, by the way, here, tells them about the necessity of distinguishing between the clean and the unclean in verse 23. But just now, I'd like to look at verses 17 and 18 with you in closing decisions. Chapter 44 of Ezekiel, verses 17 and 18.

And it shall come to pass that when they enter in at the gates of the inner court, that is, the priest, they shall be clothed with linen garments, and no wool shall come upon them, while they minister in the gates of the inner court and within. They shall have linen bonnets upon their heads, and shall have linen britches upon their loins, and they shall not gird themselves with anything that causes sweat. Now, there are two things we'd like to notice here, the antithesis upon the linen and the prohibition against anything that causes sweat.

Now then, as we turn to the New Testament to try and find the meaning of this symbolism, we find that the New Testament, in Revelation chapter 19, speaks of the bride of the Lord Jesus Christ being clothed in beautiful linen wedding garments, and the Scripture says that the linen are the righteousnesses of the saints. Linen is a symbol of the righteousnesses of the saints. It is not that intuited righteousness which we all have equally in the Lord Jesus Christ through faith in him, but it is the righteous deeds that we do, and these righteous deeds are the result of the Spirit of God working in us.

Romans chapter 14 verse 17 says, The kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit, or through the Holy Spirit. It is righteousness through the Holy Spirit. Righteous deeds produced through the Holy Spirit of God.

So that as we worship, as we participate as priests, we must present ourselves in these linen garments of righteousnesses which have been produced by the Holy Spirit of God within us. But then, there is that closing word that prohibits anything that would cause sweat. Now, sweat and stiffness is always the fruit of toil as the result of sin.

Sweat is first mentioned there in Genesis chapter 3 where it is said that man would feed his bread in the sweat of his brow. Hard toil was to be the result because of sin. But here there is to be no sweat as one serves before the Lord, and it is through the Holy Spirit of God that we can serve in a liberating way.

We can serve in a way that is natural. We can exercise our functions as a priest in a way that does not cause us to force ourselves, in a way that it becomes a delight to exercise both our holy and our royal christened. So that as we participate, then, in the things of the Lord, on Lord's day morning sayings, through the Holy Spirit of God there can be a natural overflow.

You know, I thoroughly enjoyed the Lord's supper this morning. I felt that the Holy Spirit of God was really moving, and it seemed that there was a real overflow of heart. And yet, you know, I missed the expression of a lot of brethren.

Some brethren participated, and other brethren didn't participate audibly. Indeed, I believe that we should all, not every time, but we should all, from time to time, participate audibly, as priests, led by the Spirit of God, no threat, but simply He moving our heart, He filling our heart, He giving us the overflow so that we could be, as the writer of Psalm 45, in verse 1 where he says, My heart is enjoying, my heart is overflowing with a good matter. I say to the king, my tongue is as the pen of a ready writer, or that our tongues would ever be like a pen of a ready writer, ready to speak about the Lord Jesus Christ in our worship for Him.

I think, then, that from the Old Testament especially, we find some very practical things as to our priesthood, our holy priesthood and our royal priesthood, things that can be applied very profitably as we exercise ourselves in these ways in this era. Let us pray. Blessed God, our Heavenly Father, we thank You for the Lord Jesus Christ and His redemption.

Lord, we belong to You because of Him. We've been redeemed from the slavery of sin. We've been brought into a life of liberty.

And we thank You that Your Holy Spirit has found an abiding place in our hearts because they've been cleansed by that precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. We ask, O God, that You will daily teach us from Your Word, open it to us, that we might learn more things from it, and that we might see how these things can be applied in our daily lives in a very practical way. And grant us, God, that we might truly respond, that it might be the delight of our hearts, the very desire of the inner man, that these things might be realities in our lives, that we might not simply hold to them as theories, but might manifest them in practice from day to day.

So we pray that Your gracious Holy Spirit will continue His work in our hearts, that we might be born along, and that in our witnesses, and in spite of our witnesses, we might experience daily transformation and daily growth in that knowledge, in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. So, our Father, we look to Thee with thanksgiving. We bless Thee for Thy many blessings of the past.

We trust Thee concerning the future. And we know that You will continue Your work, and that You will even do a greater work in the future than in the past. We give Thee our thanks in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/10/SID10063.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/gerry-covenhoven/the-priesthood-of-believers/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net