

The High Calling - Priesthood

by G.W. North

The sermon emphasizes the importance of presenting ourselves to God as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to Him, and living in holiness and power as priests in the priesthood of all believers.

Scripture: Romans 12:1

Topics: "Living Sacrifice", "Priesthood of Believers"

Description

G.W. North emphasizes the high calling of the priesthood for all believers, urging them to present themselves as living sacrifices to God rather than merely offering physical gifts. He explains that while the Old Testament priests had a specific role, the New Testament calls all believers to fulfill their priestly duties by interceding for others and living in holiness. North highlights that this self-presentation is essential for realizing one's birthright and fulfilling God's purpose, as it transforms believers into vital links between God and humanity. He draws parallels between the ministry of Jesus and the apostolic mission, stressing the importance of sanctification and the continuous work of the Holy Spirit in the Church. Ultimately, he calls for a unified life in the Spirit, where believers embody the holiness and power of God.

Transcript

All he meant by these words is not easy to assess. Did he mean that he was offering up people of gentile origin to God? Did he mean that gentiles were offering up themselves to God? Or was he just saying that gentiles were making offerings to God? Perhaps he wants us to believe that all three things were happening; or perhaps, after all, he was only referring to the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. There is no doubt that this truth was very dear to him, for he had referred to it (though not directly) earlier in his famous plea, 'I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world'. Quite plainly the gentiles were being exhorted to offer themselves to God rather than to bring an offering to Him. It is quite important to notice that, although the sacrifice is mentioned, the word altar is not in the text. He is not saying come and lay yourselves on the altar for God, as though thinking of some act of sacrifice akin to the typical sacrifices of the Old Testament. That surely is a noble thought, but he was not meaning that; he was thinking of something far greater than that, something which logically precedes it, namely the self-presentation of a man for the priesthood. It is a prayer directed to men, exhorting them to fulfil grace, realize their birthright and respond to the calling of God.

Although God commanded all Israel to bring sacrifices to Him, no man among them could offer even one sacrifice on God's altar unless he was a priest. Everybody could bring his offerings to God; there was no restriction on that; indeed each man was expected to do so: on the appropriate occasion everyone had to present himself with his offering at the entrance of the tabernacle before God. All men were accepted thus far, but no man could go any further or do more than that; he could approach with his gift to the altar, but there he must stop; from that point onwards he and his gift were entirely in the hands of others. At the entrance every other man but a Levite had to hand his sacrifice to a man of that tribe, but even he could not make the sacrifice if he was not of the house of Aaron; nobody but a priest made contact with the altar. In his turn therefore the Levite had to bring the sacrifice to a priest, who then finally offered it to God; sacrifice and offering was the priests' exclusive ministry.

It is to this placing and function as a priest that the apostle is calling us. In Israel when a young man of the Aaronic family attained to the age of twenty he was eligible for the ministry; his responsibility then was to present himself to the high priest for examination. If he was found to be a fit man he was then prepared by the high priest for consecration to God and instalment into office. He was not allowed to make the final decision about personal fitness; the high priest, who in the case of Aaron's own sons was their own father, did that. Although by birthright he was predestined from the moment of his birth to become a priest, when the time came he could only actually be a priest if he was acceptable to God and his father. The grounds of acceptability were carefully laid down by God for all, without prejudice or favour; the standard was nothing less than physical perfection. That proved, he also had to be made holy, and thereby acceptable to God for service. Every son of Aaron was born for this elect office; he was chosen for it in Aaron before he was born; it was a high honour. Although he did not know it until he was acquainted with the fact, he was born to fulfil this calling and purpose (perhaps from the foundation of the world. Who can tell?) For twenty years he lived, first as an ordinary baby, then as a boy and a youth, doubtless doing the same sorts of things as his companions; but as soon as he came of age he had to enter into joint-heirship with his father and older brothers who had preceded him in office. Everything else had to be left behind so that he could be made in the new likeness and be conformed to the new image; priests were not allowed any eccentricities or choices or fashions of their own; with little difference all priests had to look alike. Except for the high priest, his father and brother in office, no-one wore outstanding clothes; Aaron alone was different. For the rest, except facially and in stature and peculiarity of bearing or something distinctive in their walk, all the priests looked and did exactly the same. It was considered by everybody in Israel that this was the reasonable service of the sons of Aaron; they were expected to do it. So it was that, when the time came, these men presented their bodies a living sacrifice to God with this understanding. From that time forward they became a body of men under one head, with whom they lived and functioned in the tabernacle for God and the people.

In a very meaningful way, from the moment those priests offered themselves to God in this manner they ceased to walk after the flesh and began to walk after the Spirit. Even though beforehand they had kept the commandments and had loved the Lord their God with all their heart, if they had refused to present themselves to God at the right time they could not have fulfilled their birthright and lived according to their predestination. They would have grown fruit and vegetables and corn and made wine and raised flocks and herds like everybody else, but they would have missed their calling, prejudiced the future of Israel and earned the wrath of God besides. For the same kind of reasons Paul first pleaded with the Romans to present themselves to God, and later spoke of the offering up of the gentiles being acceptable. As far as he was concerned his duty in the matter was clear, and so was his intention: if he could get his hands on them they were going on the altar. He saw everyone as a potential voluntary sacrifice to God, that he in

turn should offer as living sacrifices to God also. Paul first offered them to Him that they in turn should offer themselves to Him. In Paul's view anything less than this was world-conformity, but conformity to this would result in transformation by mental renewal; then sacrifice and offering would become the habit of life.

The priest is the living sacrifice; he is the vital link between man and God. In his office he is the intercessor; he lives to make intercession for men and women. All priests are intercessors and mediators, just as our Lord Jesus is High Priest, Mediator and Intercessor. Priests are established in their order and position to live in it to maintain the link between God and man; in their measure they must ever live to make intercession. This is the sacrifice they must make, and, having made it, they must live it out continuously all the rest of their days. Having made this initial sacrifice they can then make all other kinds of offerings to God as Paul did, for they are sanctified to God for that purpose.

This is how the apostle viewed his ministry. He saw it as Jesus Christ saw His ministry on earth. By the power of the Spirit of God He went about showing all the signs and doing wonders for three or so years, and people were healed and blessed and amazed by it all. But in His heart it was all for one purpose, namely that the people so blessed should in the end be sanctified to God. This is why the cross came at the close of His life; the Holy Ghost has no other or greater power than the power to sanctify souls. Speaking comparatively, it is far easier to show a wonder which is but for a moment than to sanctify a soul for all eternity. One is an event, albeit spectacular, but the other is a constant work, a ministry. This is what Paul was so quick to show when he began his epistle, 'Jesus Christ our Lord ... declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead'. He finishes in the same elements as he begins -- power and holiness; only at the beginning it is rather holiness and power, and all by the Spirit.

This is that Holy One who is now come forth from the Father in Jesus' name; He lives and works in holiness and power in the Church, that everything in the Church may be done in power according to the spirit of holiness. He has come to create and sustain a spirit of holiness among us, that is to impart a constant, continuing inner power, an energy promoting a life and attitude of holiness in us. This is to be the dynamic of the Church, the spirit in which all is done; it is the air and atmosphere of all our living and working; it is the result of being in the Spirit, it is having the spirit of Christ. When this is so, the life moves on the same lines in exactly the same way as His. This Holy Spirit governs everything in the church, directing all things for the glory of God in Jesus' name; but He needs our co-operation. If we respond to the call we shall be declared sons of God with power according to the spirit of holiness, and the love of God will be shed abroad in our hearts. The Spirit and our spirit will be one, so that men will be hard put to distinguish the difference, and that is just how God wants it. He in us and we in Him will manifest such unification and likeness that whether to speak of the Spirit or of the spirit we shall not know; in fact at times it will be almost impossible, for they shall be the same, identified for the purpose of God.

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