CHRISTIAN STUDENTS

DEFINED BY GOD (2)

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood… -1 Peter 2:9a

Week 12: WE ARE A PRIESTHOOD

Definition: _____

Scripture Reading: 1 Peter 2:4-9; Exodus 19:6

I. A priest is not only one who serves God but also one who ministers God into man.

A. The priests in the Old Testament served in an outward way taking care of all the service of the tabernacle in the wilderness and the temple in the good land. **- Numbers 3:5-9**

B. The New Testament priests are those who serve God by their mingled spirit; a priest today functions mainly to bring man to God and God to man. **- Romans 12:11; Romans 7:6**

C. Because the New Testament priests serve according to their spirit they are not merely working for God but are serving God with Christ as life and in Christ. Thus to be a priest is an inward reality and not an outward work.

II. God's original purpose is that all His people would be priests.

A. God chose the nation of Israel, His chosen people in the Old Testament, to be priests to Him but because they fell into idolatry the priesthood was later assigned to the house of Levi. **- Exodus 19:6; Exodus 32:1 and 4, Deuteronomy 18:1 and 5**

B. From that time forward the priesthood became a mediatorial class functioning as a bridge between God's people and Him. - **Leviticus 9:7; Hebrews 5:1**

C. The universal priesthood which was lost by Israel is now being recovered by the church. Today the church is a kingdom of priests and every member can function as a priest. **- 1 Peter 2:9; Hebrews 10:22; Revelation 1:6 and 5:10; 1 Corinthians 14:26**

III. According to God's arrangement, no priest is to serve alone but to be a part of the priesthood.

A. Just as stones must be built together to be God's house, we must be priests built up together to become a "hood" of priests. - **1 Peter. 2:5; Exodus 19:6**

B. A hood is a collection of a particular group of people.

C. Today we are not just priests but we are in a "hood" which is the church. - **1 Peter. 2:9, Ephesians 2:19-22; 1 Corinthians 14:26**

IV. The function of the priesthood is to lift up spiritual sacrifices to God which are of three categories.

A. Christ as the reality of all the offerings in Leviticus. **- Hebrews 10:1-10**

B. The sinners we meet day by day. - **Romans 15:16; Matthew 18:20**

C. Our bodies, our praises, and the things we do for God. - **Romans 12:1; Hebrews 13:15-16; Philippians 4:18**

I. A priest is someone who does not work for God, but serves God, primarily bringing man to God, and God to man.

As the Author of salvation, He is now fully qualified to be our High Priest (Heb 2:10).

In the past many of us have had the experience of being ministered to by Christ as our High Priest without knowing much about it. Hebrews is a book on the priesthood. As we will see in future messages, the priesthood, which is mentioned in chapters 4 through 6, is fully developed in chapters 7 through 10. When we come to that portion of Hebrews, we will see more. In this message we need to spend some time to lay a foundation for a proper understanding of the priesthood.

What is a priest? We have already said that a priest is one who serves God. Although it is correct to say this, it is not adequate. A priest is not only one who serves God but also one who ministers God into man. All Christians think that a priest is one who serves God, but not many Christians know that, ultimately, a priest is one who ministers God to man. In a sense, serving God is secondary, whereas ministering God to man is primary. The basic significance of the priesthood is not to serve God but to minister God to man. If, as priests, we only know how to render service to God without knowing how to minister God to man, we will be quite poor.

The first mention of the word priest in the Bible is with Melchizedek (Gen. 14:18-20). Melchizedek was the first priest in the Bible. As we have pointed out on other occasions, the first mention of a thing in the Bible establishes the principle for that category of things. Therefore, the first mention of the priest, that of Melchizedek, establishes the principle of a priest. If you examine the case of Melchizedek as the priest of God the Most High, you will see that he did not go from man to God but came from God to man. He did not go to God and serve God; he came from God and ministered something of God to Abraham, God's seeker. After the case of Melchizedek, there is much development of this matter of the priesthood in the Bible. But we must not forget that the foundational story of the priesthood is that of a priest coming from God to minister something of God to God's people.

The main point with respect to Christ as the High Priest is not that He serves God but that He ministers God to us. We must go deeper than the superficial concept that a priest is one who serves God. Everyone, including the unbelievers on the street, knows that a Catholic priest is one who serves God, burns incense, and fulfills his "holy" duty. Even the heathen religions have priests. We need to cross the river out of this low concept into a higher one. God does not need your service, but He does want you to minister Himself to people. As the High Priest, Christ's major job is to minister God to us. Mainly what Christ does within you is to minister God into you. This is our High Priest. He is continually doing one thing—ministering God into us. Some may say that Melchizedek did not minister God. But what about the bread and the wine—what do they signify? The bread and the wine signify God as our enjoyment, God being ministered to us to refresh, sustain, support, strengthen, and nourish us that we may grow with all the riches of God. This is the primary task of a priest. In principle, we who serve God today are His priests. As priests, our main responsibility is to minister Him to people.

If you read Hebrews 1 and 2, you will see that this wonderful, mysterious, marvelous One is now our High Priest. Do not think that this High Priest only serves God. That is secondary. This High Priest is the One who continually ministers God to us. If, as a priest, you only go to God and serve Him, He will say, "I don't need you. Why do you come here and waste your time? You must go with Me to the people. You need to minister Me to people. That's what I want."

As we have seen, Christ is more than fully qualified to be our High Priest. He, the Son of God, God Himself, became a man and suffered as a man. As the Son of Man, He passed through all things and accomplished all things. Now He is qualified to minister to us as our High Priest. Regardless of our situation, He has something to minister to us. Often, the enjoyment of His priestly ministry is like breathing. There is no need for us to understand the breathing process or to analyze the air. As long as we breathe, we get all that is in the air. Likewise, many things happen in our spirit that we do not understand. Like the air, Jesus is here. As long as we contact Him by breathing Him in, we have all that we need. Nevertheless, it is a help if we know the Lord well. This enjoyment of Christ is real; it is not superstitious.

As our High Priest ministers God into us, we will gain more of God and come into His expression. Eventually, we will come to serve God. Here is where we need to make a turn. When we come to serve God, we are infused the more with God. Once we have been infused with Him, God will say, "Go and minister Me to others."

people were His priests. In regards to the other eleven tribes, God's people were only God's people; they could no longer be God's priests. This was most serious. It is serious for a person to be a believer, one of God's people, and yet not be a priest.

For about fifteen hundred years, from the time of Moses to the time of Christ, God's people were unable to come directly to God. Only one household was qualified to be the priests. A man had to belong to this household to come to God. If he drew near to God directly, he would die. During that period, the ministry of the priests became a very powerful ministry. Man could not come to God directly; he needed the intercession of the priests. How noble and great the priestly ministry was!

In 1 Peter 2:4-7 Peter tells us that Christ is the foundation of the church. He was the stone rejected by the builders who has now become the head of the corner. We have become the living stones and are joined and built up to become a spiritual house. We also have become a holy priesthood to God. It is as if a voice from heaven burst forth announcing, "All who are saved are now God's priests. All the living stones, those who are part of the spiritual house, are now priests of God."

Right then a promise which had been set aside for fifteen hundred years was recovered by God. What the Israelites lost has been recovered by the church. The universal priesthood was lost to Israel. In the New Testament age, it is as if a voice from heaven bursts forth with the promise that the universal priesthood is with us once more. All the saved ones are called to be priests.

The same word can be found in Revelation 1:6, which says, "And made us a kingdom, priests to His God and Father." Originally, the whole nation of Israel were priests. Later, this changed. But what about today? Today the church is a kingdom of priests. What the Israelites lost in the presence of the golden calf, the church has fully regained through the Lord Jesus. Today the entire church has become priests. God's ordained kingdom of priests has now been fully restored. What God could not secure among the Israelites, He is now securing through the church.

III. According to God’s arrangement, no priest is to serve alone but to be a part of the priesthood.

It is very interesting to notice that the garments of the priests are composed of the same materials as the tabernacle. Their garments were made of gold, fine linen, blue, purple, and scarlet; the tabernacle was also made with gold, fine linen, blue, purple, and scarlet. This simply means that what the priests wore was their abiding place. Their clothing was their housing.

The church is just the expression of Christ from within so many saints. Christ expressed from within us all is the church. If we do not have this expression of Christ, we do not have the church. In a sense we may rightly say that we are the church, but the real church life is the expression of Christ. So the clothing of the priests was their housing and their dwelling place. Their clothing was the same as the tabernacle, and the tabernacle was the place where they dwelt.

We must realize that the priests today are God’s dwelling place, which was typified by the tabernacle. First Peter 2:5 says, “You yourselves also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house into a holy priesthood.” We have pointed out previously that the word priesthood here means a body of priests. It does not mean the office of the priests. Priesthood in Hebrews 7:11 means the office of the priests, but here in 1 Peter 2:5, it means the body of priests. The holy priesthood is a spiritual house, a corporate body of priests. When we are filled and saturated with Christ, expressing Him in an accurate and full way, we will become God’s dwelling place. We will become the tabernacle according to type. The tabernacle could never be separated from the priests. Where there are the priests, there is always the tabernacle, and where there is the tabernacle, there are always the priests. The priests go with the tabernacle, and the tabernacle goes with the priests. The New Testament tells us clearly that the priests are the spiritual house—the tabernacle.

times in all things. We must not take this as a doctrine, but as a daily practice. All day we must feed on the Lord and take Him as our nourishment. Out of this enjoyment we will have the "garment" as the expression of Christ. It is in this expression that there is the building up of the saints who are set into the divine nature. This is the only way for the building of the church.

Within the past several decades, there has been much confusion. This is why we believe that in these last days the Lord is going to recover the priesthood of the inner life. It is not a recovery of teachings or gifts, although they do have a certain value, but it is the recovery of the church life through the priesthood. The church life through the priesthood does not come out of mere teachings or gifts, but out of the inner life.

Every moment we must be found enjoying Christ so that an expression of Him might emanate from within us. Then, in this expression, we will have the building up of the Body, and in this building of the church we will have the revelation of the Urim and the Thummim to tell us the right way to go on with the Lord. This is the light and the perfection. The enlightenment and the completeness come out of this building up of the saints who are transformed into the Lord's image and set into the divine nature. May the Lord bring us into such a priesthood.

IV. The function of the priesthood is to lift up spiritual sacrifices to God which are of three categories.

A. Christ as the reality of the offerings

The priesthood takes care of all the offerings (Lev. 6:8—7:34). All the offerings typify the different aspects of what Christ is to us. From the standpoint of experience, the trespass offering is first, the sin offering second, the peace offering third, the meal or food offering fourth, and the burnt offering fifth. Some parts of these offerings are the wave offerings, and some parts are the heave offerings (7:29-34). The priesthood must take care of these offerings. Thus, to partake of the priesthood today means that we must experience Christ as all the offerings. Only when we have experienced Christ as these offerings can we minister them to others.

After we were saved, we soon discovered that it is not simply a matter of the sinful things we do or have done, but the very nature of sin within us. Sin is within us. We not only have the sinful deeds without, but also the sinful nature within. We knew that Christ died on the cross to deal with all the sinful deeds committed before God, but now we realize that the sinful nature is within. Romans 7 calls this nature "sin that dwells in me." Then the Lord reveals to us that by dying on the cross He has not only dealt with our sins, but also our sinful nature. This means that He is not only our trespass offering but also our sin offering. Trespasses are something without, but sin is something within. Therefore, we must learn to experience Christ not only as our trespass offering but also as our sin offering.

After the experience of these two offerings, we enjoy Christ as the peace offering. Peace always depends upon dealing with all trespasses as well as dealing with our sinful nature. If we still have trespasses which are not yet forgiven and dealt with, we can never have peace within! Furthermore, if we have not dealt with the sin within us, we cannot enjoy peace within. After both our trespasses and our sinful nature have been dealt with by Christ, we can enjoy Him as our peace offering.

Following our experience of Christ as the peace offering, we find that He is also the meal or food offering. This means that Christ is our food and constant satisfaction. Then the burnt offering follows the food offering. The burnt offering is the food for God! Christ is not only our satisfaction but also God's satisfaction. He is not only our food, but He is also God's food.

But this is not all. We must also learn to experience Christ as the wave and heave offerings. First, we must experience Him as the resurrected One—as the wave offering. He is waving; that is, He is so living! He has

offered to God for His acceptance. We have to offer these sacrifices every day. This means that the preaching of the gospel of God is the daily life of a priest of the gospel in the New Testament.

As believers in Christ, we are priests of the gospel of God. According to Romans 15:16 , such a priest is a laboring priest, a working priest, an energizing priest. We can also say that such a priest is a priest of the preaching of the gospel. We may admit that we are priests of the gospel, but do we preach the gospel? The work of the priesthood is a daily work. The Old Testament priests offered the offerings every day, morning and evening. They also offered many offerings during special times such as the festivals. This shows us that we need to offer spiritual sacrifices to God at all times and on all occasions. We need to be priests of the gospel of God in our daily life.

C. Our bodies, our praises, and the things we do for God

The Significances of Presenting Our Body

Paul exhorts us to present our bodies. We often say that we offer ourselves to God, but this verse says that we are to present our bodies. To present our bodies has two significances. The first is based on chapters 6 through 8 , which speak of our body. Chapter 6 speaks about sin lording it over our body (vv. 6 , 12 , 19-21), chapter 7 shows particularly that sin dwells in our body (vv. 5 , 17-18 , 20 , 23), and chapter 8 says that our body needs to be redeemed (v. 23). Chapter 12 , in speaking about presenting our bodies, continues the thought in chapters 6 through 8 . In chapter 6 Paul speaks briefly of presenting our members to God (vv. 13 , 19) in order to prepare us for what is to follow. Then at the beginning of chapter 12 he continues chapter 6 and says that we should present our bodies to God.

To present our bodies has another significance. Only when our bodies are presented can our consecration be practical. We may have a desire to listen to messages, but unless our body comes to the meetings, simply having the desire, even with earnestness and sincerity, is impractical. A brother may pray at home, saying, “I want to offer myself to the Lord,” but if his body does not come to the meetings, his consecration is not practical. Therefore, to present our bodies to the Lord is to offer ourselves to Him in a practical way.

How do we present our bodies to the Lord in a practical way? It is by giving our time to Him, because our body exists in time. We may exemplify this by our being at work eight hours a day, which is like selling ourselves to our employer. Practically speaking, our body is sold to him for those hours. Many brothers and sisters consecrate themselves only in their intention, not taking any action in their body. This means that they have not given over their time to serve the Lord. If we do not set aside our time, our body cannot be presented. On the Lord’s Day morning some brothers and sisters come to clean the meeting hall. This proves that they are practically presenting their bodies. If we want to serve the Lord, we must set aside a time when our body is for His use. We may or may not be a full-time preacher, but while we live on earth, we should set aside times during which our body is presented to the Lord to live for Him.

Besides this, to present our bodies has another significance, that is, to not let anything that displeases the Lord occupy our bodies. On the one hand, we need to actively present every member of our body to God to be used by Him, and on the other hand, from this time onward, we should not let anything that displeases the Lord come upon us. Many times there is something in our body that is not pleasing to the Lord, yet we let this thing continue to occupy it. This means that in our intention we are consecrated, but our body is not fully presented to the Lord. Therefore, we must consecrate in a practical way to the extent that in every matter we do not allow our body to be occupied by anything that displeases the Lord. This is the significance of presenting our bodies.

A Living Sacrifice, Holy, Well Pleasing to God

Canaan, the promised land. God desires much more to see His people writing psalms and praising Him when they “walk through the valley of the shadow of death” (23:4). This is genuine praise.

This shows us the nature of praise in the eyes of God. The nature of praise is an offering, a sacrifice. In other words, praise comes from pain and suffering. Hebrews 13:15 says, “Through Him then let us offer up a sacrifice of praise continually to God, that is, the fruit of lips confessing His name.” What is a sacrifice? A sacrifice is an offering. An offering means death and loss. The person who offers an offering must suffer some loss. An offering, a sacrifice, must be offered up. This offering up constitutes a loss. The bull and the lamb are yours. When you offer them up, you are sacrificing them. To offer up something does not mean to gain anything; it means to suffer a loss. When a person offers up his praise, he is losing something; he is offering a sacrifice to God. In other words, God inflicts wounds; He breaks and cuts a person deeply, yet at the same time, such a person turns to Him and praises Him. Suffering for the sake of offering God praise is a kind of offering. God likes men to praise Him in this way. God likes to be enthroned upon this kind of praise. How can God receive His praise? God wants His children to praise Him in the midst of their sufferings. We should not praise only when there is gain. Although praise offered as a result of gain is praise, it cannot be considered an offering. The principle of offering is based on loss. An offering carries with it the element of loss. God wants us to praise Him in the midst of our loss. This makes a real offering.

We should not only pray to God but also learn all the more to praise God. We need to see the significance of praise at the very beginning of our Christian walk. We must praise God unceasingly. David received grace from God to praise seven times a day. It is a good exercise, a very good lesson, and a very good spiritual practice to praise God every day. We should learn to praise God when we get up early in the morning. We should learn to praise Him when we encounter problems, when we are at a meeting, or when we are alone. We should praise God at least seven times a day. Do not let David beat us in his praise. If we have not learned to praise God every day, it is hard to have the kind of sacrifice of praise spoken of in Hebrews 13 .

As you learn to praise, you will find that there are days in which you cannot gather yourself to praise. Perhaps you praised God seven times today, yesterday, and the day before. Perhaps you praised Him a week or a month ago. But one day you will find that you cannot utter a praise. On such days you are in pain, total darkness, or dire trouble. On such days you suffer misunderstanding and slander. You are busy shedding tears of self-pity. How can you praise God on such days? You cannot praise because you are wounded, suffering pain, and in difficulty. You feel that the most obvious response would be complaint rather than praise. You feel that the most obvious thing to do would be to murmur rather than give thanks. You do not feel like praising, and you have no intention to praise. You feel that praise is not suitable under this kind of circumstance and mood. At that very moment, you should remember that Jehovah’s throne has not changed, His name has not changed, and His glory has not changed. You should praise Him simply because He is worthy of praise. You should bless Him simply because He is worthy of all blessings. Although you are in the midst of difficulties, He is still worthy to be praised. Although you are in distress, you still have to praise Him. At that moment, your praise becomes a sacrifice of praise. Your praise is like the slaughter of your fattest calf. It is like putting your dear Isaac on the altar. Your praise in tears is a sacrifice of praise. What is an offering? An offering implies wounds, death, loss, and sacrifice. You are wounded before God. You die before God. You suffer loss, and you sacrifice before God. But you realize that God’s throne is established in the heavens and cannot be shaken, and you do not hold back your praise. This is the sacrifice of praise. God desires His children to praise Him in everything and through every situation.