

The Priesthood of Believers

*“As you come to Him, the living stone - rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to Him - you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”
1 Peter 2:5*

With the New Covenant, God fundamentally changed His divine priesthood. The Old Covenant had a separate and distinct priesthood - the Levites who were in charge of temple worship and were supported with tithes by the rest of God's people. With the New Covenant, however, the temple worship ceased because the body of Christ, His church, is now the temple of God (Ephesians 1:19-22). The specialized, full-time priesthood that performed the temple service also ceased since all believers now constitute God's priesthood who can directly know Him and serve Him (Hebrews 4:16; 8:11; 10:20; 1 Peter 2:5; and Revelation 1:6). And the practice of the law of tithing ceased because there is no longer a need for God's people to give ten percent of their income to support the temple and the priesthood (Romans 7:4; Hebrews 7:12). The Bible records the main purpose of financial collections in the first century church was to help other believers in need (Acts 2:44-45; 4:34-35; 1 Corinthians 16:1-2; and 2 Corinthians 8:12-15).

Yet much of the church today still practices a form of temple worship. When most Christians say they are going to church, they mean they are going to a special building (or temple) to worship. Much of the church also practices a separate and distinct priesthood (or professional clergy). And many churches also practice tithing. All of these practices are throwbacks to the Old Covenant. In effect, most Christians today experience a New Covenant salvation but then practice a form of Old Covenant religion and temple worship. When Christians neither know the truth nor practice the truth, they hire “professionals” who attempt to know God and interpret God for them. This was never God's New Covenant intention.

The first century believers practiced a New Covenant form of church. They met together in homes and they had a vibrant and functioning priesthood of believers. From among this active priesthood, the Holy Spirit appointed servant-leaders, or mature brothers called elders to provide oversight and shepherding (Acts 14:23; 20:17, 28; Titus 1:5; 1 Peter 5:1-4). And finally, the New Testament church did not practice tithing; they practiced giving. However, during the second and third century, the church lost connection with its head, Jesus Christ. When that occurred, the church lost sight of the truth of Christ's completed work on the cross and the truth of Christ's priesthood of all believers.

These two divine truths are inseparably linked. When Christ died, we died with Him. Our sinful nature was crucified and buried (removed) with Him so that Christ might now sovereignly live in us (Romans 6:3-11). When the church stopped submitting to Christ's headship and believing this crucial provision of His Atonement, it lost Christ's life. Without Christ's life, the church lost its identity in Christ and became carnal and soulless. Church leaders became focused on their clergy status to protect, promote and profit from their religious position. They increasingly relied on their own religious authority to ensure the obedience, unity and doctrinal purity of their church members. They nullified the Scriptures and wrongly interpreted and divided the Biblical role of elders into three separate offices - bishops, pastors, and elders. The Catholic church later added two more layers - cardinals and the pope - to this pyramidal hierarchy. By the fifth century, this religious monarchy had completely destroyed the New Covenant's priesthood of all believers and replaced it with a special caste of priests (called pastors in the Protestant church) who are salaried and “professional.” This religious priesthood then reinstated the Old Covenant practice of tithing to support themselves and their “temple” cathedrals.

We cannot expect God to approve and anoint any church that holds to a religious structure and

tradition that contradicts the Scriptures (Matthew 15:6). Whenever a church practices a form of temple worship, supports a salaried clergy separate from the laity and practices tithing, it is a sure sign that church is not submitted to Christ's headship. It is also a sure sign that church is not walking by faith in Christ's completed work on the cross and that its life and identity are no longer in Christ. The priesthood of all believers is also linked to the gifts of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:4-10). When all members of the body of Christ exercise their spiritual gifts, they do “the work of the ministry... according to the proper working of each individual part (Ephesians 4:12 & 16).” Whenever the church gathers together, this functioning priesthood of believers should be normal and evident. “What then shall we say, brothers? When you come together, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, and has an interpretation. All these things must be done for the strengthening of the church (1 Corinthians 14:26).” When the gifts of the Spirit are quenched and not freely expressed through the body, it is another sign that church is not submitted to Christ's headship. It “has lost connection with the head, from whom the entire body, supplied and held together by its joints and ligaments, grows as God causes it to grow (Colossians 2:19).

Christ purchased His holy priesthood by His blood. His people need to repent from lawlessness and submit to Christ's headship as the High Priest of their faith. God has made this possible because of Christ's death on the cross. Then the divine mystery of what really happened on the cross will be revealed to His people and they will be restored to their rightful high calling - a royal priesthood to God. “No longer will a man teach... his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ because they will all know Me (Hebrews 8:11).”

“To Him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by His blood, and has made us to be a kingdom of priests to serve His God and Father - to Him be glory and power forever and ever! Amen.” Revelation 1:5