

What It Means To be A New Testament Priest -- Tape #3

1 Peter 2:4, *"Ye as living stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ".*

In relationship to the priesthood of the believers, it is clear our priesthood is built on the acceptable sacrifice; and that is by Jesus Christ.

First let me define what will be discussed and what will not be discussed. In this modern day of denominationalism when the term 'priest' or 'priesthood' is brought up, many immediately relegate that to the Catholic church or to one of its many denominational offshoots. However, a Baptist minister would be called a pastor while a Catholic minister would be called a priest. For the most part, these are simply terms used to designate that these men are in the ministry. The present day denominational approach has nothing to do with this present study on 'priesthood' or 'What it means to be a New Testament Priest'.

Along these same lines is the distinction some Christians have made between being a minister and being "lay person". As understood by some, a minister has a special calling upon his life to the ministry while a lay person goes to church service where he gets fed and spiritually attended to by the minister. Further, the duties of a minister involve concerted time in prayer, studying the Bible and the visitation of church members, etc. That is the basic view concerning this religious concept.

These distinctions between lay person and priest can be easily refuted simply by pointing to one New Testament scripture. That verse is 1 Peter 2:9 "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation". That verse is being quote to New Testament saints. God's own people who are a peculiar people or a people of His own are the ones addressed. Interestingly, the word 'people' in that scripture is the word laity. It is the Greek word from which we derive the term "lay people" – the people that are not priests. However, it is in the context of this that we are told 'you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood'. It is saying to the same people that are called lay people that you are the priesthood of God. Both words are used in that one verse. So, in that sense, we are all priests. If you are a Christian then you are a minister of the New Covenant.

Some religious organizations may not agree, but my belief is, when it comes to baptizing someone in water, you have the right to baptize somebody if you are in the Lord and you believe the Truth regardless if you are a full-time minister or not. Those rights are a small part of what it means to be a minister of the New Covenant. In this scripture it is saying that the same people who are called to be laity are also called to be the royal priesthood. That ends the argument.

In an attempt to overthrow wrong concepts held by certain ones concerning ministry and laity some have tried to deeply impress the congregation as to the priesthood of all believers as described in the New Testament scriptures. However instead of setting forth

the true ministry, nature and aspects of a priesthood that functions as the fulfillment of the Old Covenant, they have only fought for the right of all believers to pray for people, share with the congregation from the Word of God, or have all believers to see themselves as ministers of the Lord.

It is my belief that all believers can pray for each other and should be encouraged to do so. I also believe you can share from the Word of God in the gatherings. That is not necessarily to preach though I would not have a problem with that. But there certainly is a place for all to share in the flow of the Lord during times of gathering together. We are all ministers in the sense that we are all ministers of the New Covenant. We are all called as ministers of reconciliation. In order to do that you do not have to have a little card that proclaims you as an “ordained minister” or “licensed minister”. But though all those activities are the right of all believers, do not confuse that with priesthood.

While I personally reject a clergy system as valid I believe by giving the right to all Christians to carry out the duties in a clergy system also falls short of what God had in mind for New Testament priesthood. It appears that some are refuting the clergy system but then saying that everybody has a right to function in the clergy system. They are standing up for the right to function in the clergy system while rebuking the clergy system. Is the clergy system then acceptable if it will let everybody into it?

Some may feel they have advanced beyond the average Christian because their gatherings are not held in a religious edifice. There are people who believe you are carnal if you meet in a building or have a building dedicated to that end. Therefore, in their mind, if you meet in a home you are acceptable before God. However, in the book of Acts they met in homes, in buildings and also in a temple. In fact, in the beginning of Acts they met in the temple AND from house to house. So it was very common for both to take place. Also, some may feel they have advanced beyond the average Christian because anyone has the right to preach or minister in their gathering. Yet none of these issues have any real connection to what a New Testament priest is all about.

Our goal in this study is not to set forth or bring back the patterns of the books of Acts. But to discover the meaning behind the shadows that God intended when he established the concept of priesthood among the Jews. Our purpose is not to study the shadows and copy them today. We are seeking to find the True for which the shadows were only a picture. We are not studying the Old Testament as if it is what priesthood is all about. We are trying to find, from those shadows, the True and we are studying the Real. We are talking about New Testament priesthood. Nor are we trying to set forth the patterns found in the Book of Acts as the definitive reality. They are two different things. If you saw this in the book of Acts it would not be a pattern it would be a lifestyle. I am talking about the priesthood of the believer.

In the true meaning of being a New Testament priest, you would see it in the way believers treated one another or how they reacted under fire. Why would this area of our ministry or activity be proof of being a priest more than some other area? The primary responsibility of a priest was to offer God the lamb of sacrifice. In the Old Testament the

priest would offer a spotless animal such as a lamb. But now, in the New Testament, we offer God the Lamb who has become our life. We are the priests who offer Jesus upon the altar of the circumstances of our life. For example, Stephen when they were stoning him, was being hit with rocks yet he placed his eyes upon Jesus and not the negative circumstances. Therefore, his response was not one of crying out against his accusers but he offered God the Lamb when he said, "Father forgive them". As a New Testament priest, Stephen was carrying out his ministry on behalf of those who sinned in Israel.

You see, a priest would approach the situation that Stephen was in in a completely different manner than the modern day "anointed man of God". Since there is little understanding of being a priest among Christians nowadays, everyone simply approaches life's dilemmas as if they were a prophet, or miracle worker. No thought would be given to offering God the Lamb. As the rocks were being hurled we would pray that a shield would be formed whereby all the stones would be stopped. In this manner, all men would be impressed with the miracle and would seek out the "anointed one". But Stephen did not get into any of that kind of activity. He was a priest. When he found himself in that situation he decided to offer up the Lamb to God. He laid down his life and did not fight or kick to be saved from being a priest.

There had to be someone who allowed the whole thing. It never would have happened without the authority of one guy there. His name was Saul, who later became Paul. He saw the whole thing. He did not see Jesus die on the cross but he did see Stephen die that day. He saw the lamb of God in Stephen. Later, Paul wrote about this incident many times, though he never mentions Stephen by name. He writes of being crucified with Christ. He was affected by this man whose face was glowing when, at the point of death when he should have been asking God for a miracle to get him out of the situation, he accepted death as an answer. Why? Death was not a foreign subject to a priest. His whole life involved bringing about death in order to help God's people out of their dilemmas.

As seen in the example of Stephen, being a New Testament priest involves far more than simply giving all believers the right to preach in church. It is absolutely useless to set men free from the role of laity only to release them into a cultural role of minister that has no semblance or relationship to what God had in mind when he established the shadow found in the Levitical priesthood. There are those who are working to free believers from the clergy system to allow everyone to become ministers but we are not freeing them into the very spirit and reality that this whole thing represents. We are just trying to make more room in the clergy system for all believers. Making sure that nursery workers are provided or bulletins are printed may be the duties of a modern day preacher but has nothing to do with the priesthood of the believer.

Somebody posting a bulletin that the gathering needs nursery workers has nothing to do with the priesthood of the believer unless that person is laying down their life by taking that responsibility upon themselves. THEN they are offering God the Lamb. Printing bulletins has nothing to do with the priesthood of the believer. Can you imagine the High Priest saying to the Levites, "Did you get those bulletins out?" We, as priests, are

supposed to be so caught up in the ministry of sacrifice therefore, how is something ever going to get printed? It will be done by someone who is a priest (not someone who is a minister) that is busy giving the Father Jesus on the altar of his own heart.

However, so many in the modern clergy system are concerned about their credentials. They want recognition from man that they are "of God". But, in some similar manner aren't people who are refuting the clergy system doing a similar thing? Are they not also clamoring for recognition by man as to their place and office in the ministry? Let us work on our relationship with God by Christ Jesus. The greater question is not who can minister but what is the nature of the ministry set forth in the concept of priesthood? Some are fighting over the issue as to who will be a minister but few among them are ministering as a true New Testament priest.

The call is going forth to move God's people from a congregation mentality unto a minister mentality. A congregation mentality is defined as all of us acting like cattle, being herded into a room while the great cattle herder – the preacher-- stands up and gives forth the straw that the cows are going to eat today. The idea is that we need God's people to move from acting as herded cattle into a group of functioning as ministers. That is a great idea and I totally agree with it.

But what if we do not have the spirit and nature of the real thing then what are we doing? We will be found simply copying a clergy system or devising an anti-clergy system, which we think is holy in itself but it is not. The only thing that is holy is Christ and that is when we are offering up Christ. The Father receiving His Son is the only thing making a difference.

While there are those who are trying to get people to move from a congregational mentality into a minister mentality they have been unaware that the real battle is to get all to conform to the image of Christ in terms of priesthood. Nobody ought to be a minister if he cannot lay down His Life and bring forth Christ.

Paul says in Philippians 2:5, "Let this mind be in you". In other words "think this way". Jesus made himself of no reputation – think this way. Let me show you the progression of offering and sacrifice by Jesus as a priest. First Jesus came in the form of a man, and then in the form of a servant. Jesus was God then a man, then not just a man but a servant-man, and, eventually He became a dead man. He humbled himself and then became obedient and that obedience brought Him to the death of the cross. Let this mind be in you because then God highly exalted Him. Who? The one who has this Spirit. That is the Spirit He exalts.

What shows you are a New Testament priest is when your life revolves around the Lamb. It is not all about exterior activities and things. The fulfillment of the shadow is about Christ and not about ministerial duties.

Our emphasis upon these things may stop someone from putting a sign on their office door that says "minister" but have we brought them to daily offering? . For example, is

our main focus concerning bringing about the New Testament priesthood just that of raising up a campaign of stopping the one man shows? Are we simply to put down the bad fruit but get the church on track with more good fruit? That is the wrong tree. That is the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. It operate by discovering what is bad fruit, trying to remove it while seeking to get everyone to go with more good fruit. But both good and bad fruit come from the same tree. God says, "Do not eat of it" but we stand there again and again saying this is wrong and this is right. I am over here standing with the good fruit while thinking God is really pleased with me. Where is the Life of God's Son in that? This is about Jesus not about organized religious activities.

Of course there are duties to be carried out on behalf of those who meet together. But do not confuse those things with priesthood or even with the concept of the priesthood of the believer. Removing all the distinctions between believers, if it leaves out the true work of being God's priest, has only become more of an act of re-establishing human rights than it has been of establishing God's true intention for having a priesthood. It is nothing more than standing up for human rights because Christ is not in it as any sort of fulfillment. And what kind of ministers are we making? What are we unleashing on the public? Are we releasing more people into the same system and releasing more flesh? Instead of raising up those who see the act of laying down your life for other as the true work of a priest, we raise up people who do the opposite. They stand up for their right to minister and will set about to destroy any gathering that does not believe the way they do.

Consider 1John 3:16 not John 3:16: *"By this we perceive ye the love of God, because He layed down His life for us and we ought to lay down our life for the brethren"*. Jesus made Himself of no reputation instead of trying to get a reputation as a minister. This verse calls for us to "lay down" not stand up. Standing up for what is right makes you feel good, empowers you and makes you feel something worthwhile is happening. But do not equate those actions with any semblance of what being a New Testament priest entails.

We need to know the difference even between good works such as re-establishing human rights and Christ. Some brothers are seeking to make everyone a minister but the motive behind it is not Christ but doing things in a correct way or human rights or seeking what is best for everyone – but it is not Christ. Just because someone slaps the name of 'Jesus' on their cause and labels it the "priesthood of the believer" does not justify it.

A true priest is always bringing forth Jesus on the altar of their life. Providing every member with a format whereby they can add to the service is a good thing but that does not clearly show forth what the priesthood of God is about. Standing up for that gives people a little more freedom. We may free them to be more than 'spectators in a gallery' but are they still passive in ministry as a New Testament priest. There is a bunch of church gatherings that have released people to this freedom but there is no increase of the priesthood, though they may label it the priesthood of the believer.

It appears that the real motivation of some is to attack the clergy system and dismantle it rather than bring in the priesthood that is based on an endless life. God's interest lies in having Jesus in every part; Jesus in every minister; Jesus in His Body. If we take the

emphasis off the one man minister and put it on the everyone being a minister then the focus is still not Christ. It is just another form of the system they seek to destroy. Jesus was not trying to be a minister. He ministered the life of the Father. *'The works I do are not my own. The words I speak are not my own.'* Being anti-organization is one thing but being pro-Christ is altogether another thing. We may be able to expose institutional religion for what it is but the goal is to draw the real out of the shadows of the Old Covenant.

So our goal in this book is not to study the Old Testament priesthood and then apply it to us. Instead, we want to look at the Real from which the Old Covenant was only a shadow. Israel did not recognize it by looking at the shadow. Let us look at the Real first and then comprehend why God had them doing this or why they wore that. We are not attempting to explain the Old Testament priesthood but to look at the Real and find the explanation why they did it that way. The difference being -- one approach is a studying the Old Testament. But if the Old Testament is not valid any more why would I want to do that. But if we want to know Jesus then get in and see the True. Let us see the Real and not see the shadows and not dwell in shadow land; and think we are spiritual because we know all about the shadows and we can spout stuff about Jesus in it. ***