

THE PRIESTHOOD OF BELIEVERS.

THE BIBLE CALLS ALL CHRISTIANS PRIESTS!

The Bible teaches that God granted a gift, or gifts, to every Christian with which to serve Him, His Church and all other people who need Him. These gifts look very different in each and every Christian; but we all have one calling in common: to serve as the priests of God in this world.

WHAT IS A PRIEST?

In the time of the Old Testament, the people who were set apart to serve as priests in the temple assisted the believers to bring their sacrifices and prayers to God.

But God also called all the believers known as the children of Israel, a nation of priests and a holy nation. He ordained some for facilitating the worship of His people in order to make all of His people, his servants.

One of the aspects of being a priest is that you have the privilege to speak directly to God. The Old Testament liturgy of sacrifice, prayer and worship, where ordained priests fulfilled a calling, did not rob God's people of the right to speak directly to Him as well. Personal prayer and a walk with the Lord always were aspects of the believer's life. The Lord ordained all of His people to serve Him in this world and this service was the result of their communication with the most holy God.

When Israel arrived at Mount Sinai, Moses delivered startling news from the Lord: "If you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, but you shall be to me a priestly kingdom (or kingdom of priests) and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:5-6). The Children of Israel were all being appointed to be royal priests. Each and every one of them received this privilege!

To speak of the believers as priests is different from calling them "clergy". Clergy are people set apart for a particular form of service. If it is pastoral care, they may be called pastors and if it is preaching they are called to do, it may be "preacher", teaching elder or minister (meaning servant) of the Word of God. In the Old Testament we find priests at the altars of sacrifice and as those called to a prayer ministry. You also find prophets called to make known the word of God amongst the Lord's flock. Even the kings were seen as being anointed to make God's reign visible amongst God's people and in the world.

But when the Old Testament called God's people a priestly nation, it emphasised that liturgical priests, specially called prophets and godly kings, were only instrumental in equipping all of God's people to be connected to Him, in order to serve Him with everything they owned and everything they did.

All of the law of God received at Mount Sinai had the purpose to guide the people of God in a priestly lifestyle and service, making His holiness known to everyone and fulfilling His purpose with their lives. The priestly lifestyle of God's people included their national state, their economy, their approach to social issues, their jobs, their marriage and family life and much more. In all of these facets of their lives as believers, they were called to live as those who are in constant communication with a most holy God.

PRIESTHOOD IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

There is no doubt that the response to God's promise that we are His own, also in the New Testament - and even more so in the New Testament than the old - has, at the heart of it, ***the privilege of speaking directly to God and thus serve Him as one who remains in His presence during every facet of each day's responsibilities, challenges, joys and heart aches.***

The Book of Hebrews has a lot to say about our priestly calling in the world: "Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession (the faith we profess). Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebr 4:14,16).

Whereas ancient priests needed to present blood sacrifices to qualify for access to God, Jesus' own sacrifice provided a once for all atonement. Since He died for our sins, we now are empowered to converse with God confidently. Through the Son we may enter into His presence and through His Spirit the Son brings the presence of God into our lives during each moment and each day of our lives.

BEING A PRIEST IN THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY also means that we may speak with God *for other people*, on behalf of His church and for the sake of the entire world.

This aspect of priesthood is implemented whenever a believer and a church activates its prayer ministry. Christians have discovered that their intercessory prayers can change the lives of both individuals and churches forever. Jesus taught, "If two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven" (Matthew 18:19). While any individual should appeal to God in prayer, a special promise is made for those who pray for others and who are in agreement with fellow Christians on what they petition God to do.

BEING A PRIEST IN THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY further means to **reveal God's will and gospel in this world**. This priestly function is clear whenever Christians share the saving grace of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ with others. By word, life and ministry, believers are called to express God's love for the entire world and speak His words into every circumstance and situation of all the facets of life.

WHY AM I CALLED A PRIEST?

When the Covenant God gave His commission to His people at Mount Sinai, we read in Exodus 19:8 that: "the people all answered as one: 'Everything that the Lord has spoken we will do'". They accepted their purpose and calling as God's people within the faith community and in the world.

When God delivered the Ten Commandments to Moses, the people's frame of mind changed: (Ex 20:18-19). "When all the people witnessed the thunder and lightning, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking, they were afraid and trembled and stood at a distance, and said to Moses, 'You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, or we will die'"

The meaning of being called by God to do His work and live as His people overwhelmed them. They, as a result of this, changed their minds about being God's priests in the world. They passed on this glorious privilege to the "ordained" leader, Moses. He continued to speak to God and to listen to His word. He announced the institution of the office of priests within the household of Israel. To a large extent, the people's calling to be priests was rejected by the very people so privileged to be called to this lifestyle of the believers. God had to introduce damage control and crisis management, so He instituted the office of ordained priests in order to reach His goal to speak to His people and allow them to converse with Him. Influencing the life of believers became the task of only a small component of ordained office holders called priests.

IN CHRIST ALL BELIEVERS WERE RESTORED INTO THE PRIESTHOOD OF GOD.

When the Christian church was planted by the apostles, the calling of all believers to serve as priests was rejuvenated. Peter declared, "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light" (1 Peter 2:9).

God's word did not come as a promise for the future, but as the proclamation of His will for the Christian Church and community. God said through the apostle Peter: "You are ... a royal priesthood." He ordained (at our baptism) every believer to be a representative of His Kingdom, with access to His throne, with a responsibility on behalf of all the world and authority to act for the King, Jesus our leader and head.

John Calvin applied this truth by forming a polity wherein members and ordained elders (teaching and ruling) would all serve the Lord, namely as peers in the proclamation of the Word, peers in intercessory prayer, and peers in the mission of the Church and the Kingdom of Christ. Our Presbyterian view of the priesthood of all believers and of the office of elder being key in influencing the priestly calling of all believers in this world, originates in this rejuvenation of the Apostolic teaching. It is a holy calling and a great mercy and privilege bestowed on every Christian. Never again will God's people have the opportunity to declare that "Moses" must serve on their behalf. Being in Christ does not allow us to not be His priest in this world.

Are you willing to serve the holy God with all of your life? Do you listen to His word and speak it into the lives of all that you have contact with? Do you every day come to the throne of mercy on the grounds of the sacrifice of our High Priest, Jesus? Do you intercede for the church and for the world? Do you submit to your calling as a priest of the most holy God?

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