

RESTORING THE PRIESTHOOD OF ALL CHRISTIANS

If you are a Christian you are a priest. That's right! One of the great falsehoods perpetrated upon the world and the church of Christ is the teaching that in a congregation there is one priest and many members. Instead, the New Testament of Christ teaches the priesthood of all Christians.

Hello I'm Larry Murdock.

Midways of the third century there was a bishop by the name of Cyprian who taught that the Lord's Supper is a sacrifice offered by the priest to God. Cyprian was wrong on two counts. First, he was wrong to think that the Lord's Supper is a sacrifice. It is never called a sacrifice in the New Testament. It is a memorial of a sacrifice, the sacrifice of Christ for the sin of the world. The sacrifice of Christ happened one time. It does not happen each time the Lord's Supper is taken. Heb 9:27 and 28 says, "...Just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, *even* so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him." So Cyprian was wrong in thinking that the Lord's Supper is a sacrifice. It is not a sacrifice; it is a memorial of the one sacrifice Christ made for the world.

But Cyprian was also wrong about the priest. Cyprian had in mind one priest in each congregation offering the Lord's Supper to God. The Bible knows nothing about a "clergy" or special priesthood apart from the people of the church. In fact, the apostle Peter wrote that all Christians are priests. Peter commanded all Christians to "put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander. Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation-- if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good." (1 Peter 2:1-3 ESV.) Peter continued in verse 5, "you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." Peter says Christians are a holy priesthood. This is all of them, not just one here and there. Every Christian is a priest. Well what kind of "spiritual sacrifices" to these people offer to God? Down in verse 9 Peter wrote, "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellences of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received

mercy, but now you have received mercy. Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.” (1 Peter 2:9-12 ESV.) For several more verses Peter enumerates the kinds of spiritual sacrifices God’s holy priesthood will make. They will abstain from the passions of the flesh. They will conduct themselves in an honorable way. They will be zealous of good works. By doing good Christians will “put to silence the ignorance of foolish people”, says Peter. (Vs. 15.) Christians will honor everyone. They will love the brotherhood. They will fear God. They will also honor the king, and all who are in authority. These Christians will also endure sorrows while suffering unjustly. They will follow the example of Christ who suffered for them. These are just some of the “spiritual sacrifices” that these Christians would make to God. The writer of Hebrews told Christians to “do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.” (Hebrews 13:16 ESV.)

The sacrifices that Christians offer to God have nothing to do with the Lord’s Supper, but everything to do with a Christian’s daily life. Yes, these priests partake of the Lord’s Supper on the Lord’s Day. But they partake of it for themselves. Christian men and Christian women partake of the spiritual body and blood of Christ and thus commune with Christ in the supper. They do not partake of the bread and the fruit of the vine on behalf of anyone else. Are you a Christian man or woman, boy or girl? Then you are a priest before God. Your high priest is Jesus Christ. What kind of life will you live before God as a sacrifice to Him?

The apostle Paul wrote that Christians are to make themselves “living sacrifices.” (1) I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. (2) Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. (3) For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith

that God has assigned. (4) For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, (5) so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. (Rom 12:1-5 ESV.)

There is no special class of Christians? There are different talents and abilities, and thus different roles assigned by God, by which Christians serve God. For example, those who have the ability to teach, teach others as they have opportunity. Christian men may preach, or teach, both publicly and privately. However, Christian women teach other women and children. They may not teach men and thus supplant or usurp the authority of men. In 1Timothy 2:11-12 ESV Paul wrote, “Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. (12) I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet.” However, older women are commanded to teach younger women. In Titus 2:3-4 ESV, Paul wrote, “Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, (4) and so [teach, KJV] the young women to love their husbands and children....”

Even though all Christian men and women are priests before God, they serve with different measures of authority. Christian men are commanded to serve in authoritative roles. Christian men who meet certain God appointed qualifications can serve as Elders. In the New Testament Elders are also called bishops, and pastors, or shepherds. There are these three descriptive names for the same position of authority in the local church. Furthermore, in the New Testament churches there were always a plurality bishops, or elders. You never read of only one elder or bishop over a church, and certainly you never read of only one bishop over several churches. These priests who serve as elders serve in local churches. They have no authority outside of the local church. On the other hand, apostles, prophets, and evangelists, were given authority to teach the word of Christ in all the churches, wherever they are permitted to speak. The apostle Paul once wrote, “For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, (6) who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time. (7) For this I was appointed a preacher and an apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying), a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.” (1Timothy 2:5-7 ESV.) Paul was appointed as an apostle; in that role he was also a teacher. His job was to faithfully preach and teach what he had been given to preach by the Holy Spirit. This was the job of all the apostles. In

the Bible we have their authoritative message from God's Spirit. Thus, the apostles and prophets of the New Testament still play their role in the church of today. For what do we preach? We preach and teach the apostles' doctrine. The New Testament church "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers." (Acts 2:42 ESV.)

The priesthoods that we see in the religious world today is an aberration of what Christ commanded for His church. In the world we see a special class of priests who live by a special class of rules, generally speaking we see a men's club. We also see in the world hierarchies of priests. We find the local priest, then the bishop, then the archbishop, then the cardinals, and finally the human head.

In the New Testament of Christ we find a whole church of priests, from top to bottom, all on the same level, male and female, slave and free, rich and poor. In the New Testament the whole church was a special class of people. Paul described them as "a peculiar people, zealous of good works." (Titus 2:14 KJV.)

Can we reproduce this New Testament simplicity in the world today? Yes we can. Yes, we have. The churches of Christ across the world are reproducing in local neighborhoods the church of the first century. Come and join us in restoring New Testament Christianity. Become a priest in the church of Christ. If you will believe the gospel of Christ and repent of your sins, then you can receive God's gracious forgiveness when you are baptized into Christ. Obey the gospel; become a Christian today.