

Captive's Corner



"Bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ"

2 Corinthians 10:5

Jail Impact Ministries ECS Ministries P.O. Box 1028, Dubuque, Iowa 52004-1028 www.ecsministries.org

Today's Priesthood and Its Sacrifices

God's desire for Israel, His chosen earthly people, was for them to be a kingdom of priests. However, this depended on their obedience and, thus, they failed the Lord - Exodus 19:6. Later, God would choose Aaron and His sons for the office of priest. After that the only way to become a priest was by being born into the priestly family and tribe. Therefore, the tribe of Levi became known as

Everyone who believes on Jesus Christ is born again by a spiritual birth into the kingdom of God and becomes a priest to God at the moment of faith - John 3:3-18; Revelations 1:5-6.

the Levitical Priesthood, a group or tribe within Israel set apart to the continual service of the Lord - Exodus 28:1; Numbers 8:5-14; Joshua 3:3; Hebrews 9:6. Please notice here that it is God establishing His priesthood and determining how persons enter into it. It is by His divine appointment not man's. He simply reveals in His Word to man His will on the matter. Man's part is to humbly submit to His will. So at this point God had a tribe of priests instead of a kingdom of priests. Eventually, due to unbelief, Israel

along with its priesthood and its priestly service and sacrifices was temporarily set aside until the church age runs its course - Romans 11 especially verses 20-24.

Now, in this present age, the church age or age of grace as it is called, God also has a priesthood. This priesthood is also by divine appointment, not by man's appointment. By His apostles He has clearly revealed to us His will on how one enters this New Testament priesthood and what kind of sacrifices the New Testament priest is to offer to God. From John 3:3-18 with Revelation 1:5-6 we see that everyone who believes on Jesus Christ is born again by a spiritual birth into the kingdom of God and becomes a priest to God at the moment of faith. All believers, together, are now a kingdom of priests to offer up spiritual sacrifices to God - Revelation 5:9-10; 1 Peter 2:1-9, especially verses 5 and 9. Verse 5 tells us that as Christians we are living stones being built up as a spiritual house, a holy priesthood. As Christians we are so closely identified and united with Christ that His very life exists in us. We share in or partake in His life - Galatians 2:20; Colossians 1:27; 2 Peter 1:4; Colossians 3:3-4. God sets each of us in place and integrates us with one another and with Christ to form the body of Christ, a holy priesthood - 1 Corinthians 12:13; Hebrews 3:6; 1 Peter 2:5. Notice as kind of an aside here the contrast between the Old and the New. In the Old Testament, Israel was God's chosen earthly people with a priesthood which only included one of the twelve tribes and was entered into by a physical birth. The priests' consecration to God included a physical washing, and their duty was to

offer physical sacrifices to God - Leviticus 1:1-6; 8:6-36; Numbers 16:40; 18:7. In the New Testament, the church is formed as God's heavenly people and given every spiritual blessing in Christ Jesus. The church joins both Jews and Gentiles into one body. It is a royal and holy priesthood which is entered into by a spiritual birth and includes every member. Every New Testament believer-priest is consecrated to God by a spiritual washing with Christ's blood to offer up spiritual sacrifices to God - Ephesians 2:13-22; 2:6; Colossians 3:1-4; Ephesians 1:3; 2 Peter 1:3; Titus 2:14; 1 Peter 2:5. Do you see the significance? In Christ, as New Testament priests, we have an infinitely higher position, possession, and calling than the Old Testament priesthood. Consider this carefully my friend. It is fascinating, especially since it is conditioned upon the obedience of God's Son Who did not fail and cannot fail - 2 Timothy 2:13; John 17:4; Titus 1:2; Hebrews 6:18; Malachi 3:6! We enter into the pure beauty of Christ's Person and work by faith, believing on Him and His work, not our own - Romans 4:5; Hebrews 4:2.

Just as the Old Testament priesthood offered up specific sacrifices to God, so do we as a New Testament priesthood. Romans 12:1 tells us that we are to offer ourselves to God as a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God. This is our reasonable service or spiritual worship to Him. What always comes with the idea of offering a sacrifice is that the sacrifice is no longer that of the offerer once offered. Once offered it is wholly that of the one it is offered to. To offer ourselves is to agree with and live in light of the fact that I am no longer my own, but I am Yours Lord - 1 Corinthians 6:19-20. My will is no longer mine but Yours Lord - John 6:38; 17:4. The members of my body are now to be used for righteousness

All believers, together, are now a kingdom of priests to offer up spiritual sacrifices to God - 1 Peter 2:1-9.

because they are Yours and You are righteous - Romans 6:13; 8:1-13; 1 John 2:1. It is no longer my own desires, goals, and rights that I pursue and defend but rather Yours Lord since mine have been offered up - Philippians 2:5-8; Ephesians 5:2. The first Old Testament priestly sacrifice mentioned in Leviticus is the burnt offering. God's command was that the burnt offering was to be entirely consumed on the

altar. It all went up to God in the sweet smelling aroma of obedience. This offering pictures a life wholly devoted and given to God for His pleasure. According to Romans 12:1, as a New Testament priest to God we become the offerer and the offering, just as Jesus did. We offer ourselves and God is delighted to receive us in Christ a perfect sacrifice, for In Christ we are blameless, righteous, and entirely accepted by God - 1 Corinthians 1:30; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Ephesians 1:6. This is great grace isn't it! He makes us fit in Christ and then pleads with us to present ourselves as a living sacrifice. In Christ we meet all the qualifications of an

acceptable sacrifice - Leviticus 23:12; Exodus 12:5. This offering of ourselves wholly to God as a living sacrifice is the only reasonable response to the "depth of the riches" we receive in Christ Jesus (Romans 11:33) by "the mercies of God" (Romans 12:1). Since all things are for God's glory (Romans 11:36) we must offer ourselves for this very purpose (1 Corinthians 10:31).

The sacrifice of praise, the fruit of our lips, that gives thanks to His Name is also our spiritual sacrifice - Hebrews 13:15. This relates to the first sacrifice I mentioned in that as we offer ourselves our lips are now His to give praise to Him, to glorify Him, to speak for Him, and to make Him known. Paul said, "We believe and therefore we speak" about Jesus - 2

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Corinthians 4:13. 1 Peter 2:9 says that we are a "royal priesthood ... that we may proclaim the excellencies of Him Who has called us out of darkness and into His marvelous light." Our priestly calling and service is continual, so it makes perfect sense that God would command us to give thanks in everything, rejoice always, and pray without ceasing - 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18. These are all the "fruit of our lips" that glorifies Him. So, if we are murmuring, complaining, or gossiping, we are not fulfilling our priestly duty. As believer-priests we have access to God, making possible our prayers, which are a sweet smelling aroma going up to Him - Ephesians 2:18; Revelation 5:8-10; 8:3. So let us praise God, give thanks, rejoice, pray, and build up one another (Ephesians 4:29). Paul and Silas exemplified this for us while they were incarcerated in Acts 16:19-34, especially v. 25. In addition, Hebrews 13:16 tells us that good works and sharing are also our spiritual sacrifices. We are newly created in Christ to do good works - Ephesians 2:8-10; Titus 3:3-8; 1 Corinthians 10:31; Matthew 5:16. Since God alone is good (Luke 18:19) we can

The sacrifice of praise, good works, and sharing are also spiritual sacrifices we offer as New Testament priests - Hebrews 13:15-16.

define a good work as anything we do which is consistent with His character. God is love - 1 John 4. God is also light, which yields righteousness and truth - 1 John 1; 1 John 2:1; John 1:17. Sharing speaks of the offering of our possessions - Philippians 4:18. Since we have been bought by His blood, it follows that all we possess is His. Thus, it is to be used to His glory and in light of the fact that we have been given surpassing riches in Christ Jesus - Ephesians 3:8; 2 Corinthians 6:10; Colossians 2:3. As we offer this spiritual sacrifice we lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven which are eternal and of far greater value than all the treasures on earth - Matthew 6:19-20. However, as we offer, we need to be mindful that God is also concerned with the attitude with which we share. He loves a cheerful giver - 2 Corinthians 9:7. So let us make the most of every opportunity to benefit others, especially to those in the household of faith - Galatians 6:9-10.

Those who believe the gospel we share become children of God. They are another priestly spiritual sacrifice we offer to God - Romans 15:16. Romans 10:14-17 tells us that faith comes by hearing the gospel, and people can not hear it unless someone preaches it. Students at times ask if their completion of the Bible correspondence courses will give them the credentials to become a minister. I love answering their letters because when you have good news, you enjoy telling it! I let them know that if they have believed on Christ above, they have been given and currently possess all they need to minister to others. Thus, they are indeed a minister of Christ Jesus (a priest appointed, equipped, empowered, and commanded by God to serve). So start serving and offering the sacrifices to your Lord. The laborers are

few and the harvest is great - Ephesians 3:7. This is so important because every time someone hears the gospel they have opportunity to believe. This is why Paul spoke of Christ once he believed, and kept speaking until he was entirely poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of faith of those he ministered to - 2 Corinthians 4:13; 2 Timothy 4:6-8. We are lights in the world because contained in us is the Light - Jesus (2 Corinthians 4:6-7). To bring the good news of Jesus Christ is to shine the Light into a dark world. This is our priestly service. The fruits of our labor are those who are saved when they believe the good news - John 15:16. In the Old Testament they were to offer the first fruits of their harvest - Leviticus 23:10-11; Deuteronomy 26:1-4. As New Testament priests who sow the gospel seed, we offer the entire harvest as a spiritual sacrifice to God.

Lastly, in Philippians 2:16-17 Paul encouraged the Philippian believer-priests to hold fast the Word of Life they had believed on for eternal life. He called their faith a "sacrifice" and a "service." Our submission to God's only offer of salvation in Christ commits us to the very One Who has saved us. By faith, which is trustfully believing what God says—

The life of faith is a life lived in dependence upon God. This faith is a pleasing sacrifice to Him - Hebrews 11:6; Colossians 2:6-7; Philippians 2:16-17.

that He is able to perform exactly what He promises—we daily work out our salvation, depending on God to work His good pleasure in us and through us. So the life of faith is a life lived in dependence upon God to do in us and through us by His Spirit what we cannot do ourselves. This is grace. We serve Him by grace through faith - Galatians 5:16-18, 25; Romans 8:1-17; Hebrews 12:1-28. This faith is a pleasing sacrifice to God. Only He can enable us to serve in a way pleasing to Him. Therefore, we live by faith - Hebrews 11:6; Philippians 1:6; 2:12-13; Colossians 2:6-7; Galatians 2:20; Hebrews 10:38.

In closing I would like to say that the Lord looks for those who are wholly devoted to Him so that He can strongly support them - 2 Chronicles 16:9. He knows whether we are fulfilling our priestly duties and offering up the spiritual sacrifices - Revelation 2:19. He is a jealous God. Therefore, we should not offer what is rightfully His to another - Exodus 20:5a; 22:20; Hebrews 12:5-11. He even knows the thoughts and intents of our heart as we offer - 1 Samuel 16:7; Psalm 139 especially vv. 1-4. In light of the kingdom we are receiving and God Whom we are serving, we should serve with reverence and godly fear - Hebrews 12:28. He does not forget our labor of love which we have done in His

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Name, and He is soon returning with His reward - Hebrews 6:10; Revelation 22:12. Jesus, our Great High Priest Glory to His Name - Hebrews 2:17-18; Hebrews 5 and 7-8:1; Romans 14:10.

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