

PRIESTHOOD OF THE BELIEVER

Written By

Bob Koivisto

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Introduction to Priesthood of the Believer

Jesus spoke out often about the very things which lead to a misguided understanding of God's revealed truth in the Scriptures. Those influences are ignorance, apathy, religion, tradition and open rebellion to what God has said.

Through a combination of those influences above, the church has lost sight of a long neglected truth both in precept and practice. This truth is not hidden nor does it need special revelation or insight to be understood. There has been through all of history a few who have dared to practice and understand what the Bible says about this teaching and even the Reformers themselves believed what the Bible taught on the subject, though in practice, it did not continue as part of the overall Reformation.

This little book is not designed to point fingers nor to play the blame game, but to hold forth a vital truth of God's word and to help restore into practice a lost principle vital to the life of The Church.

May the Lord be glorified in and through this work.

All citations are from the NET Bible

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CHAPTER 1

What Exactly Is the Problem?

Few would disagree that the Body of Christ as seen in the Evangelical church, bears little resemblance to those believers in the early Church who turned the world upside down by their holy boldness. The authority is the same. The command is the same. The power is the same. What went wrong?

A former professor of mine compared the modern church to an NFL football game with twenty two men desperately in need of rest and eighty thousand desperately in need of exercise. Churchmanship has become a spectator sport. More than one observer of church history has suggested that in the early church *God was the audience* and the people were the performers rather than as today, the *people being the audience* and the pastor the performer.

The lines have been drawn clearly between two classes of Christians: the Clergy and the Laity. This artificial division has divided and crippled the church; the church has actually been split into the enlightened and the unenlightened, the ordained and the un-ordained, the minister and the people, and the performer and the spectators. As a result, in many circles, there is a certain rank and privilege and various titles that serve to elevate one person above another before God. One searches in vain the pages of Scripture for any kind of hierarchy which we observe in the modern church, even in the most subtle of forms.

How can we ever know that our plan is God's plan for the Church?

No matter what denial is made of the facts, in practice, much of the church is divided into two classes of Christians and the ministry remains in the hands of the holy few. The people in the Body have lost opportunity by disenfranchisement and by default and indifference. The time has come to ... "search the Scriptures..." and to restore the Berean attitude of asking "why and who says?" Acts 17:11: *Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so.*

The Berean believers even held the Apostle Paul to the standard that **precept and practice** should be the same. They believed that Scripture was the measure of all things. Most Christians believe that this is the “church age”, and that the New Testament is about The Church, but most leadership have strayed from a serious consideration of the roots for our behavior as a church as it appears on the pages of the New Testament.

I remember in graduate class one day when church polity was taught, and it was very much a matter of just going to the Bible cafeteria and choosing what you like best, and with what you are most comfortable. It is virtually never an issue in modern evangelicalism worth considering what the New Testament order is for either church or missions. Church activity, behavior, and purpose have all been left to a matter of personal choice, a cafeteria of options, or choices based on one’s tradition, or where comfort level is greatest or what our “denomination” has always done. This leads us to conclude that God really had no plan in place, nor purpose for gathering, nor sound theological and Biblical patterns for the church meeting together throughout history. And so all Christians have a full buffet of options at the church cafeteria and can choose according to our own interests and perceived needs.

What does God’s glory have to do with anything?

If God wants and deserves “*glory to Himself in The Church and in Jesus Christ to all generations*” (Ephesians 3:21), then who determines the model and the standard which most clearly defines and describes that glory? If left to man to decide, then we shall never know with certainty if God really is being seen in the fullness of the glory as He has designed and deserves, or if we simply have a human invention which is measured as evaluated by some human standard. The current measure of an approved and successful church meeting is based on things like, *how large, how prosperous, the music program, the building, the small groups, the size and talent in the worship team, the sermons (especially the sermons), short term missions, and the recovery groups*. God told Moses ... Hebrews 8:5, in the design and building of the tabernacle: *He says, "THAT YOU MAKE all things ACCORDING TO THE PATTERN WHICH WAS SHOWN YOU ON THE MOUNTAIN."* If God’s glory was to be revealed in the complexity of the tabernacle then how much easier and less burdensome is His glory to be revealed clearly in the simple and transparent meeting of The Church?

In the gathering of the Church, the believers gather under the care and oversight of elders, who train, integrate and participate with and supervise the people under their care.

If the members of the local body allow their role as *believer-priests* to be stolen and usurped by a single individual who, for convenience sake or tradition or perceived need, to become the center of attention and the focus of ministry, the individual role of believer priest will never be fully realized and practiced. A disenfranchised priesthood of believers will never and can never offer up those sacrifices to God, as He instructs and commands. If the attention and focus in the meeting of the church is on the duty, the performance, and the sermon of the man who “stands in front”, the believer priests are not needed. Yes, believers do need training and equipping and leading by those who are mature and responsible. God has designed a plan where leadership “*among the flock*” by both “*example*” and the personal participation in discipleship, results in effective participation in the church and in the world.

Everything but the simplicity of the Biblical model has been tried which is: believer priests gathering at the table of remembrance and using and developing spiritual gifts. Hebrews 13:10 “*We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat.*” The entire pattern of the New Testament in the meeting of the church is a gathering of believers who recognized their priestly duty and opportunity of coming together for a “love feast” to remember, to feast on the Savior, and to mutually “*build up*” fellow members “*in their most holy faith*”.

The believers came together to use spiritual gifts and to help each other mature in Christ..... 1 Cor 14:26

“*What is the outcome then, brethren? When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, and has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.*”

What is the role God has given leadership to show and train the saints how to participate in the life of the body and to become involved in their role as believer priests?

The Church can gather under the loving, involved, and concerned leadership of the elders *among the flock*.

*1 Peter 5:1-3 “Therefore, I exhort the elders **among** you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight **not under compulsion**, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and **not for sordid gain**, but with eagerness; **nor** yet as **lording it over** those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock.”*

It is our sad observation over the last 60 years of being in Christ, that those in leadership seldom if ever lead the flock by example and both show and tell the saints how to make disciples and reach out to a lost world. It is the paneled office and not the coffee shop or the market place or the campus where the average leader hangs out. The believer priest would have an undeniably powerful motivation not only to develop their personal priestly ministry, their spiritual gift, and their personal evangelism if they could see their leaders doing and teaching the same. When, you must ask, is the last time your leader took you with him and showed you how to reach out to lost people in the marketplace or the coffee shop. Just recently a church leader told me in no uncertain terms that Jesus would never just walk up to someone and start telling them the Gospel. Are we reading the same Bible? So, I asked, “Please show me how to do it your way”.

The other central passage concerning the oversight and leadership of the Church is in Acts 20:28-30

*“Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, **among which** the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd The Church of God which He purchased with His own blood. “I know that after my departure, savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.”*

There is no question that the involved, personal, face to face, in depth and attentive ministry of the elders in The Church is to **lead, feed, guide, and**

protect the flock of God. When believers are protected and trained, they can then function fruitfully and effectively not only within the gathering of the Church, but in the community as they intentionally and effectively reach out to others with the genuine Gospel of Grace. A local pastor told me recently that you cannot turn people loose in the church meeting, for they may become unmanageable and come up with crazy things, and get out of control and say things which are clearly wrong. Trained people and led people and protected people do not go off the rails, at least not for long. Trained saints are fruitful saints.

The most central and neglected teaching of the Reformation and Scripture for the Church

Most people who are genuine believers agree that the Reformation was a refreshing of the Biblical imperative of justification through **faith alone in Christ alone** by **grace alone** and in the **sufficiency of Scripture** for all faith and practice. However, another fundamental to the Reformation movement and the teaching of Scripture was found in the practice **of priesthood of all believers**. Martin Luther thought that the word priest should have become as common as the word Christian. He clearly stated in his commentary on First and Second Peter that *all Christians are priests*. He and other Reformers commonly taught that there was no hierarchy where “*the priesthood*” was a vocation and “*milking a cow*” was not.

CUSTOM WITHOUT TRUTH IS ERROR GROWN OLD

Custom without truth is indeed error grown old. The excitement, the power, and the passion for souls, and the delight in ministry (the work of an obedient servant) would quickly return to the Church if men and women and boys and girls should discover the wonderful truth of the priesthood of all believers and how to practice it. It is clear from Hebrews and Psalm 110, that there is a High Priest over the house of God and all believers stand with Him who has entered “within the veil” and can “boldly enter” that same holy place with Him because we have “been cleansed” and are now protected by imputed righteousness and His “intercession” for us. The teaching in I Peter 2:5 “*you yourselves, as living stones, are built up as a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood and to offer spiritual sacrifices that are acceptable to God through Jesus Christ... and as well*

as in Revelation 1:6 “*and has appointed us as a kingdom, as priests serving his God and Father - to him be the glory and the power forever and ever! Amen*”. Revelation 5:10 “*You have appointed them as a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth.*” We are more than simply an individual priest serving under our Great High Priest, but a priesthood, meaning a **corporate body of people** serving the living God in His holy presence and offering Him the sacrifices that He finds acceptable.

There is no need for the man in the pew to exercise his priesthood, if in practice there is already a single priest in charge of the congregation.

In the contemporary church, the Pastor is the **beloved ringmaster** who is in charge of running the church, giving the sermons, taking up the collection, giving the altar call, dedicating the babies, planning the services, counseling the needy, choosing the hymns, and telling the congregation when to stand up and when to sit down, and is sometimes found sweeping the foyer when volunteers are in short supply. The measureable results by any business standard can be rated a failure, even though most local churches are run like a business. If indeed, the purpose of the “pastoral ministry” in the local church was to “train the saints for the works of ministry... to build up the body of Christ...” (Eph 4:11-12), and modern accountability measures were used, the entire system could be called a giant failure. Let me explain why. There is no active believer priesthood if there is no need for one. There is no need for the use of spiritual gifts, if the entire church service focuses on the center ring and the dear leader who is called pastor and the congregation-audience only participates when told how and when.

What is the measure of success according to God’s standard?

I have personally interviewed hundreds of church members immediately after the sermon asking a two part question. The first being, “how did you come to know God better today?”, and secondly, “how did you learn to serve Him more effectively?” The most common and consistent response was something like this: “Let me get back to you on that. It is too soon after the sermon.” So even if the sermon were to follow the New Testament model from the Epistles and Biblical teaching patterns, then the following 3 elements would always be in place. The speaker would always be unwrapping the package of truth in the

following order: 1. What do you want me to know? 2. What do you want me to believe? 3. What do you want me to do? Upon reading and listening to thousands of sermons over the years, that Biblical pattern is almost never followed. Point number three is almost never mentioned because it requires the “pastor” to leave his office during his work day, and to become both the model and the participant and the disciple maker. The elders of the church are called to work “**among**” the flock of God, and as “**examples**” to the flock. Can the Holy Spirit be trusted to energize the saints of God to use their gifts to mutual benefit of all? If God has designed for just one man to have the entire responsibility of “ministry” to the body, why doesn’t the Scripture say so? If He is not on the mark, or is wrong, or weak, or misleading others, how then does the body benefit? Paul teaches that “*each person*” has the right and responsibility to serve and build up the body, when the Church “*comes together.*” Cf. I Corinthians 14:26.

If the “lecture method” was the most effective way of teaching, it would be a raging success in the church. For the most part, the “face the front and take notes” method is not working. Why are the people of God remaining so ignorant and uninvolved in the use of their own spiritual gifts and the exercise of the believers’ priesthood?

The key to an effective priesthood is trained and participating saints

Sadly I can report that almost never are those three elements which God has chosen as His pattern, present in the modern homily at the “church on the corner.” 99.9% of the time, there is no meaningful time spent on the third step of application concerning just exactly how the truth is to be applied in life. A man must take ownership of that in which he participates and contributes. The priesthood of the believer is a role of individual gifted participation. The barriers we erect soon dissolve between walk and talk as we become transparent and vulnerable to others by and through our mutual participation. Active and participating leadership enables and empowers and motivates men and women and boys and girls to obedience.

Effective leadership recognizes that the priesthood needs training, teaching, and engaging

It is almost impossible to find church leadership joining in with, taking along, and showing a church member how to apply the Word of God and personally modeling in the public venue Biblical discipleship. A simple test:

Where does your leader park his car all day?

Did Jesus really direct His ministry from His office on the Mount of Olives? Where would Jesus park? Would it be at Starbucks, or the college campus, or at the Mall? The meaning of Discipleship to the Lord Jesus was not the result of taking a class and completing a workbook. The disciples and the Master were never separated by rank, nor distance, but He took on Himself, “the form of a servant”, and together they endured, they suffered, they learned, and the “captain of our salvation” led by example. As we shall learn later, the leadership of the Church rests upon the elders who are “*among the flock*” of God. Elders who are “*among*” the flock train and lead best by example and the rest of the believer priests learn by doing.

What do leaders say?

All of those church leaders I have taken to lunch and politely asked basic questions about their ministries have said almost universally that they: **1.** Never personally disciple anyone. **2.** Are currently not making disciples in the Biblical sense. **3.** Do not have plans to do so. Most Pastors have openly stated there is simply no time with their responsibility of “running the church and preparing the sermons.” What is in common with virtually all the leadership which includes pastors, elders, deacons, chairman of committees, and even missionaries is that they themselves were never mentored or discipled personally. Jesus never said to His disciples anything about Sunday school, seminary, or Bible College. He said, “Follow me, and I will make you into fishermen of men.”

To be in the priesthood, is to be involved in the process. Priesthood in Scripture always means an active role before God and before men. The Disciples certainly were not lacking in knowledge and skill because they followed the Master into

the field and learned by doing. Where does your pastor park his car all day? Many phone conversations with pastors over the years have ended with the angry retort, “Why are you bothering me anyway, don’t you understand that I have a big church to run.”

Most of the men with whom I work in street evangelism and campus outreach, are Biblically literate and theologically brilliant, not because they have been to school but because they have learned by example and from necessity and as a result of being part of the process. Our interactive participation with one another, leads to growth, responsibility, and maturity. They have also learned accountability, and how to walk with God and how to effectively communicate their faith. When members are involved in the process, they grow and mature, learn how to fish for men, learn the meaning of true discipleship, and how to integrate with the body in the use of one’s spiritual gift. They are no longer just spectators. They become active believer priests with an active ministry with the body and the world.

An active and informed and engaged believer priest grows to maturity because he must in order to survive and become victorious in a lost world

In the most casual conversation over coffee, in the last 30 years, we have not discovered one single church member who **intentionally and regularly** shares the Gospel with others (followers are fishers). Few, if any at all, from pew sitter to pastor carry any tracts, booklets, or DVDs to share with those to whom they intentionally or accidentally speak. Few, if any ever schedule intentional outreach in the local market place or plan to take anyone with them to show them how. None who say they believe in such a simple basic concept as the “will of God” can explain how to get a navigational fix on the will of God. None when asked, if they believed in the Spiritual life, could give an organized and Biblical explanation of how to live the Spiritual life or describe the basic ministry of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer, and ALL including leadership, could not explain how to effectively deal with sin in the personal life from a Biblical perspective with Biblical examples. None could respond in any meaningful way about what Scripture says concerning the three areas of temptation and how to deal with each one. Is there now any question as to why church members are powerless and ineffective?

Is the system working or is the system broken? When asked the simplest question about how one becomes a Christian, the most consistent answer was that you “ask Jesus into your heart.” Which verse is that? And to top it off, there was no consistent explanation of what the Gospel is.

Can the active involvement of Church Leadership and the recognition of the role of the believer priest actually make a world changing difference?

Is the pastoral system as practiced at the *church on the corner*, actually working when it comes to reaching, equipping, building, and training men and women and boys and girls in an active Biblical faith? When one is willing to examine the Biblical differences between a **one man ministry system**, and a Spirit enfranchised, equipped and empowered congregation of **believer priests**, who are being attended to by church elders, the differences are significant. If one man is in charge, and he has weaknesses and failures and blind spots or is unaccountable, the entire body is affected. As priesthood is practiced and modeled, each person is acutely aware of his own vital role in the life of the covenant community and with each other and before God.

In I Timothy 4:12, leadership was urged to be *examples* to the flock of God, and an example is a full participant not just telling but showing. That is what an elder *among the flock* does. Multiple leadership has its own built in safety factor because multiple leadership leads to mutual accountability.

The Biblical model of the meeting of the Church provides all believers a genuine framework and purpose and venue for the practice of the priesthood of all believers. Genuine fellowship is interactive.

*I am speaking to thoughtful people. Consider what I say. Is not the cup of blessing that we bless a **sharing** (fellowship in the Greek) in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread that we break a **sharing** in the body of Christ? Because there is **one** bread, we who are many are **one** body, for we all share the **one** bread. I Cor. 10:15-17*

*They were devoting **themselves** to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Acts 2:48*

For this reason, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. A person

*should examine himself first, and in this way let him eat the bread and drink of the cup. For the one who eats and drinks without careful regard for the body eats and drinks judgment against himself. That is why many of you are weak and sick, and quite a few are dead. But if we examined ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned with the world. So then, my brothers and sisters, when you come together to eat, wait for one another. If anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, so that **when you assemble** it does not lead to judgment. I will give directions about other matters when I come. (See the entire context of I Cor. 11:17-34)*

What should you do then, brothers and sisters? When you **come together**, each one has a song, has a lesson, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all these things be done for the strengthening of The Church. I Cor. 14:26

*In him the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being **built together** into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. Eph.2:21*

What does the Church do when it comes together?

The key word to understanding the Body Life of The Church in I Corinthians is some form of the phrase of “**come together**”. It’s used at least four times from Chapter 10-14. That use, of course, gives us a very strong clue as to what The Church does when it **comes together**. All spiritual gifts are given in the context of the meeting of The Church for mutual benefit and growth among members of the body, and does not determine necessarily who sweeps the foyer after the service. To be mainly and basically a spectator in the meeting does not allow time or place for the use and exercise of these gifts among and between members of the body. Even the celebration of the Lord’s Supper (the act and reason for the gathering of the early Church) defined fellowship in sharing in the body and blood. The act of eating and drinking and feasting was regular and corporate. When Paul describes growth in Ephesians, it is because members are *connected* just as muscle and bone in the body with life flowing to life and not just as mutual spectators all looking at the back of someone else’s head. Spiritual growth is never viewed as simply as an unconnected and independent activity.

Alan Watts, the beatnik writer commented wryly that the modern church service is “people sitting in rows looking at the back of someone’s head, who is looking at the back of someone’s head, who is looking at the back of someone’s head thinking about what he is going to have for lunch.

If it is not printed in the bulletin, it is not going to happen

*But you, dear friends, by **building yourselves up in your most holy faith...** Jude 20* The Church of the New Testament was an **interactive** Church. It was a Church of *mutual participation* and **benefit**. It was a Church which was connected person to person. The Church was one which was fully integrated one person to another in both growth and concern and feasting with the Lord and others at His table. It was a Church when coming together used individual gifts for mutual benefit. It was a Church which celebrated a love feast as fellow believer priests eating together “from a table of which they (the Levitical priest) were not worthy.” The meeting of the Church was a participation at the table of remembrance and a feasting on the sacrifice by believer priests.

When Paul introduced the teaching on communion in I Corinthians, he introduced the term “**Table of the Lord.**” That was a phrase from Malachi in which the prophet described the Altar of Sacrifice which anticipated the one final sacrifice of God’s Lamb. Then it makes sense as we learn how to come there to the Lord’s Table as believer priests to “remember” Him at this memorial feast. We as believer priests may also feast on Him who is our food.

Phillip Schaff in his History of Christianity Vol.17 records the words of Martin Luther:

“All Christians are truly of the spiritual estate, and there is no difference among them... It is faith that makes men priests, faith that unites them to Christ, and gives them the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, this oil, better than any that ever comes from the horn of a bishop or pope—gives them not the name only, but the nature, purity, the power of priests; and this anointing have all they received who are believers in Christ.

The priesthood of the believer is designed to be practiced in community and to focus on the one who has called us together to remember Him and both offer up sacrifice and to remember the sacrifice

Almost everyone asked said, “Yes, I believe in the priesthood of all believers.”

When individual believers were asked about priesthood, they said, “Yes we believe in that”... ..and “we even have it listed as part of our statement of faith in the back of the hymn book.” None however, when asked for further details could mention a single Biblical source, a description of the doctrine in practice, or why or how the believer priesthood might be relevant to the life of the Church. Sadly, the response of church leadership was very much the same.

A true radical is a person of his roots

Most new storefront churches are born out of dissatisfaction with a church relationship gone sour or one which has reached the place of the intolerable. Just as many socialists claim that socialism has not failed but rather it has not been tried correctly, so also many church goers claim the church has not failed it just has not been tried correctly. But in virtually every single start up church, which has been formed out of dissatisfaction of one’s previous church relationship, the pattern used for the new one is the same as for the old one. Does anyone ever try and determine in any detail what the pattern for the meeting of The Church is on the pages of the New Testament and why not? Does anyone ever try and look at the roots of his faith as a true radical does? Even with a sincere heart and Godly motivations, one can never discern the will of God for the Church without looking at the roots of our faith and God’s plan for the Church in the Scripture. A genuine radical (latin. *Radix*) is a person of his roots. In English we have the derivative *radish*, which is a root vegetable.

CUSTOM TO WHICH ALL MEN SLAVERY BRINGS, THE DULL EXCUSE FOR DOING STUPID THINGS

Louder music, highly paid “worship leaders”, fantastic preaching, gourmet coffee, a dozen different recovery programs, food, fun and fellowship for the youth are not nor have ever been the measure of the New Testament Church.

If however, there is no pattern in Scripture, which God has designed to bring glory to Himself, then it really matters very little what we do for our church model and we should keep appealing to the world system to attract more people and give them what they want. Then we must keep doing church until we do it “right” finally, and we must be in a church where we feel comfortable, and our felt needs are met and we have corrected everything done wrong in our last church relationship. Above all, we must be pretending to consult Scripture, because in the matter of “doing church”, God has left us on our own in this matter because people and customs and backgrounds and experience and hurts and successes and likes and dislikes are all very different.

If God had a plan for the local church, it would have at least been mentioned in the Bible.

Do we really believe that God has left us completely on our own here since it says nothing about how I do church? Then it obviously says nothing at all we must conclude. May I suggest that the modern church system in which the Pastor is the performer, and the people are the audience is totally broken and ineffective and unproductive in the church’s use of their spiritual gifts within the body life of the church to build up one another in their “most holy faith” and in the effective reach out with intention to a lost world. If the “one man ministry” system was God’s best design for the Church, one would think that there would be occasional pockets of effectiveness and brilliance and stunning success and influence. Why then even bother with the place of the believer priest? Yes we have seen moments of brilliance when it comes to great speakers and preachers and teachers in the recent history of the Church. And in the history of the Church, there have been giants. But the audience and congregations have simply been spectators and not participants as the New Testament teaches. All believers have been inspired and taught by great preachers of the Word of God.

Yes we see teaching meetings in the Scripture and God has given gifted men as teachers to the body. But the Church gathering to "remember me" is much more than being an audience member listening to a lecture. God's design is for the believer priest to be a participant in the meeting and an agent of grace to a lost and dying world.

Did God in His original plan call for His people to be merely spectators and for the Church to be divided into two classes of Christians?

My old UCLA classmate Jim Rutz points out in his book **Megashift**, that pastors are hired because the issue is *control*. The layman has relinquished control. They have abandoned responsibility and turned the management of the company over to the pastor/CEO. Those in the company do what they are told and when to do it. There is no caste system in the New Testament. And **yet if someone else is going to participate in the church service today, it must be decided before the bulletin is printed. If the Holy Spirit was not involved, how would anyone be able to tell?**

Most claim that the New Testament says little to nothing on how to do Church

It is amazing how much active opposition there is to the genuine Biblical model for the meeting of the Church as it is demonstrated on the pages of the New Testament. When I have asked several well known Christian leaders about what they think the Scripture says about what the Church does when it comes together, they have unanimously said that it “says very little.” What they are really admitting is that in their opinion, “it says very little about what I do.” By years of encounters with Church leaders and members, I assure you that the position of this writer is treated with great hostility and also regarded as absolutely anti-Church. In counseling several Pastors over the years, when recognizing the truth of Scripture about leadership, gifts, and participating priesthood, the universal response was, “I am too old to learn another job!”

In I Corinthians chapters 10-14 the activities of the Church are very clear when it gathers as a Church. The role of the Pastor is conspicuous by its absence. Four times, the basic Greek word for coming together is used in this section, so there can be no mistake that the passage is speaking about the Church *coming together*. The central passage, in this writer’s opinion, is I Corinthians 14:26: *“What is the outcome then, brethren? **When you assemble**, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification”*.

Recently, a pastor friend of mine, strenuously objected to verse 26 being applied to the members of “his Church” participating in the “body life” of the

Church. He gave two reasons. First of all, he saw in this passage, Paul actually criticizing and rebuking the Church for participating and speaking out and being involved during the Church service. After all, he said, people are to be “quiet and attentive.” And secondly, he said that if you actually turn people loose in the service, they might say something wrong. Actually, trained people can be trusted to use their gifts and to speak out in praise, worship, and mutual edification.

It is no surprise there is such universal ignorance of one’s personal spiritual gift. With the **beloved ringmaster** in complete control, the participants perform as they are told and trained and programmed. When most people were interviewed and asked about their spiritual gift, most said that gifting determined their job at the Church building, such as setting up chairs or being an usher or preparing the cookies and coffee. When the bible speaks of growth in the body, the only description of growth in the Church is in the mutual participation in the use of gifts as life flows to life. Eph 4:15-16

“we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.”

Can genuine Biblical leadership close the gap and re-energize the body?

In a careful effort not to condemn, Alexander Strauch in **Biblical Eldership** says:

“Many godly clergymen, servants of God’s people, faithfully minister to the saints. My contention is that the clergy-laity division, as a system, is contrary to the apostolic church model and ultimately damages both the spiritual development of the Lord’s people and Biblical church leadership.”

Just because no special priestly or clerical class exclusively performs the church ministry does not mean that the church is leaderless, or that all believers are equal in their gifts and abilities, influences or desires or devotion to God. All Christians are priests, saints and ministers, but not all are apostles, teachers, leaders, pastors and elders. Not all have the same measure of maturity, wisdom, and love of God.

The fundamental error of the clerical system is that it violates Jesus' teaching on humility and servant hood, which in turn alters the very character of the Christian Community.

Clericalism falsely exalts and separates those with teaching and leadership gifts from the rest of the Christian brotherhood. It gives those select few lofty titles (e.g. Reverend) and exclusive privileges that have little to do with their spiritual gift. From its beginning, clericalism has been obsessed with power, position, control, and authority. Thus it is a continuation of the prideful, self-centered religious structures Jesus so vigorously denounced in His day." (Matt. 23:1-12. Pp.262-3) pp.262-3

Without a doubt, Paul teaches in Ephesians 4 that God has given men as gifts to the church for the singular purpose of *training the saints for the works of ministry*. The root meaning for the word *ministry* is really more closely related to serving, and virtually nothing to do with rank or privilege. **Ministry and minister is never described in the New Testament as a profession to be chosen, but simply a lifestyle choice for every believer.** These apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers, have a role much like a coach. Today in the Church, we often pay the coach to suit-up and be a one man team and make every play.

Do we really practice what we preach in Church leadership?

The traditional administrators of many churches today in the evangelical world claim to believe and practice "elder rule." How does that in a practical sense affect the opportunity for more participation, accountability, and spiritual development? If I must judge by my own observations and the candid conversations with others, things are not looking good. Again the coffee shop has been my office where I have invited and paid for the refreshments of many in church leadership, especially elders. Not one single elder when politely questioned what he believed to be the four most important functions of eldership in the New Testament, could give a single one. This is troublesome. The key to the meaningful and full participation of the members in the body life of the Church is the active training, involvement, and oversight of the elders **among the flock of God.**

There are four basic functions of eldership in the two New Testament passages on elder function. Those are found in Acts 20 and I Peter 5. The details will follow later in another chapter. **The four basics are to lead, feed, guide, and protect.** If a responsibility cannot be either defined or described, it cannot be practiced. If it cannot be practiced, it cannot be taught nor duplicated. More often than not, elders are chosen because they hold the power of the purse, are successful in the community, have roots going back to the founding of the church, or are simply willing to rubber stamp the decisions of the pastor. This kind of passive and uninformed leadership cannot and never will contribute to the development and participation of members in the body life of the church and spur and motivate the body to reach out to a lost and dying world. Trained and prepared and accountable saints are fruitful and effective saints.

Do elders get “elected” because they are already acting in that role, or do they get “elected” and then start to behave as elders? Should elders be recognized because they indeed are already elders? Are people in the body given the electing choice who should “rule” over them and to whom they should “obey.” This of course is food for thought.

S. Lewis Johnson made the bold suggestion that, “elders choose people, people don’t choose elders.”

Acts 20:28

*“Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, **among which** the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.”*

1 Peter 5:2

*“Shepherd the flock of God **among you...**”*

Both central passages on Church eldership, which describe the relationship of leadership to the people of God, describe that leadership purposely as **among** the sheep, not **over** the sheep. As servant leaders, they had no special rank or privilege but were to prove their leadership role by example as in I Peter 5:2 which leaves no room whatsoever for an authoritarian dictatorship or “chief priest” or passive figure-head. Some would even argue with much justification,

that the modern role of the indispensable “Pastor” is not found in Scripture at all.

As servant leaders, elders had no special rank or privilege but were to prove their leadership role by example in I Peter 5:3: “... *but proving to be **examples** to the flock.*’ God never exhorts the people of God with generalities, but with specifics and when God commands, He not only enables, but shows how. When Jesus said to the fishermen for example, “*follow me and I will make you to become fishermen of men*”. He not only took men with Him, showed them how, but spent all the time required to bring those men to maturity and success. They didn’t start in the pew or the classroom, but at the local coffee shop and street corner and market place and synagogue. He built into and built relationships with those He trained. All through the pages of the New Testament, the apostles spent face time with men and women whom they were training and showing the way to “*turn men from darkness to light... to commit to faithful men... to teach them everything I have taught you... and to be an example to the believers.*”

Earl D. Radmacher writes in **The Question of Elders**:

“This failure of the believer priests to realize that each of them was uniquely gifted for service led to the development of a two-fold problem that has been a blight of the churches for several centuries. The problem on the pastoral side was the development of the Jack-of-all-trades syndrome (compare my article by that title). The resultant problem for the rest of the believer priests was the spectator trap. They were equipped by God to serve, but they simply came to sit, soak, and altogether too often, sour. A repetition of Hebrews 4:11-14 has been seen over and over again. The bulk of the work was left in the hands of one or a few. The masses were not mobilized for use of their gifts. By reason of disuse, therefore, they lost their abilities in the Word of God even though they had access by reason of their priesthood.” Pg. 1

Yes, “They that labor in word and doctrine are worthy of double honor.” Yes, “the servant is worthy of his hire.” Yes, the eldership of the Church is divided into those who rule and those who study and teach. Yet nowhere does the Bible teach that the one or a few are to be elevated over the flock of God and then go on to designate those as the ministers.

INTEGRATED LEADERSHIP LEADS TO FULL PARTICIPATION

“...shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight...” 1 Peter 5:2
When the servant leadership is not “lording it over the flock”, but leading from within as Peter instructs the elders, then the members can see grace and obedience modeled and in action. The pattern, which is in use most commonly today, denies the opportunity for the believer to function within the Church as God has called him to do.

Alexander Hay says in **New Testament Order for Church and Missions:**

“Comparing the order followed by a modern formal Church with that of a New Testament congregation, it is not difficult to discern the underlying cause of our weakness. There lacks in the church today- in its structure, its services, and its ministry- the practical recognition of the priesthood of all believers. The participation of all the members in the ministry through the gifts of the Spirit is not permitted.” p 295

Platinum, Gold, Silver or Bronze

It was clear from the pages of the New Testament that there was only one level of obedience and participation, and that all members of the body were to be involved at that level in their use and development of their gifts and that a *follower* is also a *fisher*. Today, we offer participation options such as platinum, gold, silver, or bronze. The higher levels are represented by the leadership and lower by those who regularly attend and pay the tithe. As a new believer, I didn't know that intentional and regular outreach to others was not generally part of being a Christian. I did not know that keeping an appointment calendar for the “Gospel on a napkin” presentation was not part of the normal Christian life. How many times have I heard fellow Christians say when asking how God is using them personally to share the faith, reply, “what do you think we are paying the Pastor for?” We learned in school that during the Civil War, you could pay someone else to take your place in the Army, when you were conscripted, to enlist and fight. It was clear from the pages of the New Testament that there was only one level of obedience and participation, and that all members of the body were to be involved at that level in their use and development of their gifts.

This treatise is not written with a critical spirit, but rather is intended as a wake-up call to the people of God. It is time to take possession of the high calling of ministry to Him and to the Church and to a lost world. It is time to retake the lost ground stolen from us by the dual enemies of ignorance and apathy. Please dear reader; consider carefully in the following chapters of the ***The Priesthood of the Believer*** to which we are called and how we may participate.

Are you really willing simply to roll over and believe that the New Testament, which is all about the Church in the last days of planet earth, really says nothing specific, or vital or absolute about the instrument through which God seeks “glory for Himself?” It is His glory and His glory alone, regardless of our opinion, or our measure of success or our agreement, or satisfaction or even our opinion or tradition. Our goal is and should always be all glory to God alone. **Soli Deo Gloria – “To God alone be the Glory”**

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CHAPTER 2

The Old Testament Pattern and the New Testament Practice

The Jewish world of Jesus' day

Most of the early followers of Jesus were born into a Jewish community divided into two religious groups. The two groups were separated into the *religious elite* and the *ordinary member of the community*. The historical roots for this “covenant community” find its origins reaching almost 2000 years into the past. The religious practices of Jesus day were based on history, Scripture, but most of all, tradition.

God entrusted to this obscure group of tribes in the Middle East the most precious gifts ever given to the world. The first was the promise of a Messiah for the world and secondly God’s own revelation of Himself and His plan to the world in the Scriptures. Through the initial promise and covenant with Father Abraham of a land, a seed, a nation and a promised Messiah, the Jews were to be a blessing to the whole world. Later in their history, they were given continual heavenly information through their prophets and more promises and prophecies of the Messiah. Sadly, the Jews defaulted on their promise to be a blessing to the world, and to be a “light to the Gentiles”, and did not even recognize their own Messiah when he came, but for the most part rejected and killed Him. The religious leaders of the day had lost sight of the real meaning of the Abrahamic Covenant, the message of the Law and the Prophets, and the promise of a suffering servant, the Messiah.

Had the Judaism of Jesus' day become cultic?

Some would suggest that the religion of the Jews was essentially cultic. Judaism had become a mere hollow shell of its original glory. The common practice of the Jewish religion had become formal, external, liturgical, procedural, and very hypocritical. The religious leaders were placing unbearable burdens upon the ordinary man by the twisting and mis-reading, and misapplying the Scripture. Much of what was taught was not even found in Scripture but in commentaries and traditions of the Rabbis or of personal

interpretation. As Jesus said, these leaders had become “blind men leading blind men.” And that they were teaching for their doctrines, “the commandments of men.”

The Jewish world of Jesus’ day was receiving very little truth from Scripture, but the people were living under an authoritarian religious system where the members were kept in ignorance, did what they were told to do, and believed what they were told to believe. Jesus was extremely disruptive to the religious community when He continually exhorted the members to “search the Scriptures.”

Who had access to the truth of God and to the God of truth?

The High Priest was the only member of the elite who had any direct access to God whatsoever, and that was in a fearful encounter once a year. As in Hebrews 9:25, the High Priest “enters the holy place once a year.” The High Priest was held in regard in an honored and exalted position and as the one who had a special privilege and standing before God. The priestly class was a completely “different class of human being.” They held such a place of extreme honor in the Covenant Community, that they were considered spiritually superior. They were part of the *professional* religious order who had standing before God not shared by the ordinary man. They were literally born into that place of honor. There were others in the religious community who had a privileged place such as scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees, but though not as high a level as the High Priest and the priestly class. They had a special rank and authority as well, but not shared by ordinary community members.

Leadership can be either a bridge or a barrier

By careful comparison, a parallel could be made today, even in the less formal and liturgical evangelical churches, that everything which is done, believed, or thought religiously, is a direct result of what the followers are told to think, believe, and do. Almost nothing is questioned or challenged Biblically; almost all fundamentals of the faith are either misunderstood or unknown; and there is virtually no involvement in a passion for reaching a lost world and making

disciples. It is obviously easier, to allow a paid minister be the center of attention and authority in every church service, be the source of all knowledge and truth, to be the one who is closer to God and to be the one *ordained* to be a *minister of the Gospel*. To most people who are religious, **church has become a place where, not a people who.** When the truth one believes is no longer portable or personal, it is no longer practical. And its true practice is only done by the initiated and ordained. The early true believers in Acts even challenged the Apostle Paul's teaching to determine if it was Biblical." *These Jews were more open-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they eagerly received the message, examining the scriptures carefully every day to see if these things were so.*" Acts 17:11

An entirely new way of knowing God and serving Him and others

With few exceptions, those of the religious class were not held in the highest esteem by Jesus. Those with religious position were generally able to hold their own higher standing to their own advantage. For the first time in centuries, the Jewish Community would be introduced through the work of Messiah to the possibility and reality of having personal access to God in a priestly way and to become a person of influence to others in the things of God.

Every member of this *New Covenant* community would have Jesus as their High Priest representing him continually before God and the believer-priest would be granted personal and continual access into the throne room of heaven. He could now go before God personally and safely, forgiven, and without fear.

"We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, sure and steadfast, which reaches inside behind the curtain, where Jesus our forerunner entered on our behalf, since he became a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek" Hebrews 6:19-20

"Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, by the fresh and living way that he inaugurated for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a sincere heart in the assurance that

faith brings, because we have had our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed in pure water” Hebrews 10:19-22

This new standing before God and access to His presence is based on a new relationship. There is now a *great high priest* over the house of God that prays for His own and intercedes and protects, and provides access and gives confidence in God’s Holy of Holies. Jesus is now the only true and continuing mediator between God and man. Jesus “ever lives” to intercede for his own priestly class of believers.

“For there is one God and one intermediary between God and humanity, the man Christ Jesus.” 1 Timothy 2:5

How do I walk in these new shoes?

All the requirements for Godly behavior, personal holiness, public ministry and service to God including the offering of sacrifices are set by pattern and example under the Old Covenant. These are modeled precisely by the believer priest under the New Covenant.

A bit of important background

When giving the law to Moses, God revealed a complex and intricate system of moral, social, and religious order. God established the tabernacle and the priesthood which foreshadowed the ultimate fulfillment in the person and work of Christ. The earthly tabernacle and Levitical and Aaronic priesthood were designed to present the holy character of God and the means by which his justice can be satisfied and a way that man might have access into his presence.

God’s deep desire was for the entire nation to be a kingdom of priests. *You will be called, the Lord’s priests, servants of our God.* Isaiah 61:6

The New Testament truth of the priesthood of all believers is not some kind of special hidden truth revealed only to the enlightened and initiated. This doctrine is generally accepted and readily affirmed, but in reality is never generally understood, expounded, or practiced. There is really no surprise or

special truth, and it might even be said that the priesthood of every believer is really hiding “in plain sight.” Both **tradition** and **neglect** can easily mask truth which lies in “plain sight.”

If the Church does have a priestly ministry among the saints, it is by default. It is not because the saints were taught and trained how to serve God and man as a member of a universal priesthood. Obedient servants always have a ministry toward God and others. But without a Biblical basis for understanding the priesthood, that service cannot be effectively taught nor communicated to others. The truth about the priesthood of every believer cannot become a transferrable concept. You cannot teach and train others in a belief and practice you do not fully understand yourself. It cannot be easily duplicated. Membership in the priesthood for the believer is not a matter of tribal heritage, but is a matter of a “new birth-right” and Biblical understanding.

Truth delayed is truth denied

Fundamentalists and evangelicals, in an effort to avoid sacramentalism, sacerdotalism, formalism and the liturgy, have avoided to a fault any reference within the church to priesthood and offering of sacrifices and altars. Unfortunately, both the baby and the bathwater have gone out the window together. There is a close relationship between the shadow of the Old and the substance of the New. If we believers are a “theater” (eng. Spectacle) to the “*world and angels and men*” (I Cor. 4:9), then it is vital for the Glory of God that as members of the *redeemed cast*, we display God’s glory and purpose as He has written in the script, not performing as casual members of an improvisation troupe.

Both the privileges and duties of the Old Testament priesthood have a clear pattern and parallel for the New Testament priesthood. There is a rich heritage from which we may draw to better understand our role in the Church and in the world before God and men. The following side by side comparisons between the Old and the New will surprise most and are likely to bring an entirely new perspective and opportunity for the Body of Christ. The

illustrations are not exhaustive but are evidence enough to demonstrate a better understanding and practice of the believer's priesthood.

The New is in the Old concealed; The Old is in the New revealed

Offer gifts and sacrifices

2 Chron 31:2-3

Rom 12:1-2

Heb 13:15-16

1 Peter 2:5

Maintain the tabernacle (temple)

Num 18:5-7

1 Cor 3:16-17

1 Cor 6:19-20

Be and pronounce a blessing to others

Num 6:22-2

1 Cor 4:12

1 Chron 23:13-14

Rom 12:14

Teach God's word and commit it to others

Deut 31:9-14

Matt 28:18-20

Mal 2:7-8

2 Tim 2:2

Purify the unclean

Lev, 15:23

Jude 22-23

Gal 6:1-2

Have access to God

Lev 16:17-18

Heb 10:19-22

Consecrated to God

Ex 19:22

Rom 12:1-2

Put on sacred garments

Ex 28:1-4

Rom 13:14

1 Peter 5:5

Eph 6:13-18

Anointed by God

Ex 29:5-9

1 John 2:20

2 Cor 1:21

Consecrated by blood

Ex 29:19-21

1 John 1:7

1 Peter 1:18-20

Eat of the sacrifice offering

Ex 29:31-34

Heb 13:10-11

Lev 8:31

John 6:55-57

1 Cor 9:13-14

1 Cor 10:18-19

Must be holy to take part in the sacrifice

Lev 21:6-7

1 Cor 11:29-32

Be cleansed before entering God's presence

Ex 40:30-32

Heb 9:13-14

Lev 16:24-25

Heb. 10:19-22

Be perfect to come before God

Lev 21:16-22:1

Heb 10:14-15

Heb 7:11-12

Eph 5:27

Jude 24-25

Adhere to highest standard in marriage

Lev 21:7-15

Eph 5:21-33

Draw near to God

Lev 16:15-19

James 4:8-9

Heb 10:22

Supervise the giving

Neh 10:38-39

1 Cor 16:1-2

2 Cor 8:1-5

2 Cor 9:10-12

Sound the trumpet in calling the assembly to battle

Num 10:1-11

1 Cor 14:8-10

2 Tim 4:2-3

Col 1:28

Keep the congregation holy

Lev 15:30-32

Heb 3:12-14

Gal 6:1-2

Act as magistrates

Deut 17:8-13

1 Cor 6:1-8

1 Cor 5:12-13

Matt 18:15-21

Be discerning

Ezek 44:22-25

Heb 5:13-14

Acts 17:11-12

1 John 4:6

Encourage God's army in time of Battle

Deut 20:2-5

2 Tim 2:3-4

Eph 6:12-17

Possess no inheritance in the land

Num 18:20

Heb 11:13-16

Deut 10:9

Heb 12:28-29

Phil 3:20

Have no possession except God

Ezek 44:28

1 Peter 1:4-5

Col 1:11-13

Heb 9:15

What do all these comparisons mean and why should we care?

Few would dare to claim that the Levitical and Aaronic priesthood are in effect today. A number of the “Christian cults” adhere to a strange mixture of both partial abolition and partial restoration of the Old Testament priestly order. However as the New Testament makes clear, the old order has been completely abolished, eradicated, and replaced by a New Covenant. The Book of Hebrews speaks of a “change for the better” a dozen times. The individual believer is now part of a priesthood which has access to God personally and personal representation and protection by his own high priest who “lives forever to make intercession for us.”

Hidden in the Old is a model and pattern and shadow of the New. This list of comparisons is far from complete and in no way exhaustive. But it should be sufficient enough to demonstrate that the concept of the believers’ priesthood did not arrive as an entirely new concept or without historical precedent. If a believer pays close attention to what has been written and in the chapter to come, that one should discover a whole new world of opportunity and a deeper appreciation of the role within the body, unto the world, and before God.

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Chapter 3

Moving Toward a Solution

If nothing is broken, there is no reason to fix it

A simple search of the web for the topic “Solving your church problems”, will show hundreds of entries. These listings demonstrate and proscribe how to *fix* broken churches, ineffective worship teams, making your sermons more appealing, raising church attendance, improving community outreach, developing your preschool programs and community food programs, and even how to have a better coffee bar. Entire management teams, for a fee, will come into the church for 10 days to provide a very costly upgrade plan usually patterned after a successful secular business model. Many Bible Schools and Seminaries give degrees in Conflict Resolution and Church Management and offer courses in how to increase church income, raise church attendance, develop the small group, and even how to set up a pre-school. The radical Christian is compelled to return to his Biblical roots to search for answers.

Just recently I sat down with a local pastor of a large denominational church and we reviewed step by step about how to show the saints the Biblical method of evangelism and discipleship. He emailed me about 10 days later to thank me for the visit and that they would just continue with the new “program” they have started on outreach. This pastor never himself, goes into the marketplace, or the neighborhood, or the coffee shop, by his own admission, and does not now nor ever has trained young men in outreach. None of the elders in that church with whom I have had coffee have ever reached out evangelistically, been discipled, or intend to make disciples. Which better “solves” the church’s outreach failure, training and involvement in the Biblical model, or the overlay of a new “program”? All of the seminary graduates I know personally have been warned by their teachers about getting “too close” to the members of their congregation. They are taught to keep their distance from those in the church. Various reasons are given and they range from, “you are the clergy and they are not” and; “if they see too much of your personal life, they might not understand how and why you live the way

you do.” In order to maintain the mystique of the “ministry”, a man must keep his distance. At this point, we need to ask the question whether Jesus kept himself separated in the luxury hotel suite as He and the disciples traveled about, or if they shared the same hostel together? How many examples can one find in the Scriptures of an intense discipleship relationship which was effective which is not based on a footstep fellowship? There is no substitute for and never will be any *program* which will ever replace the Biblical Model for the priesthood of all believers trained by effective caring leadership *among the flock of God*.

Elders in the church are told to **shepherd** (ποιμνίου) which means actually to lead, feed, guide and protect the flock of God. You can always tell who the good shepherds are because they smell just like the sheep in the flock. They have an intimate connection with everyone in the flock. You know that they are working among the flock. One cannot be an effective shepherd from a distance or from a swivel chair in the office. The key to effective involvement in the priesthood of the believer starts with the example of leadership, the involvement of leadership, and the training by good leadership. The most singular goal of Godly leadership is to **make men independently dependent on God and to make themselves unnecessary**.

In every instance in which I have returned to churches which have made the big push and appeal to revive the church, or improve the giving, or fix the vision, or give a vision for outreach, or even to begin a dynamic earth changing program, or another 12 step program, I have found that nothing has changed. When the program ends, the church organization returns back to its traditional habits and gets ready for the next program for *change*.

Lead, Feed, Guide, and Protect

Both the test and the measure of Peter’s love for the Lord Jesus was his willingness to *feed the sheep*. Two different words are used in conversation in John 21 for taking care of the sheep. One means to help the sheep find pasture and the other speaks of the shepherd’s tender care of the sheep. **There is no effective pastoral ministry without a close relationship with the flock.** Both

the leadership within the Church, *elders*, and leadership to the Churches, *apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor/teachers* are given the commission to feed and equip the saints *for the works of service*.

The sheep in the pasture and the sheeple in the pews grow and reproduce because they are fed and become strong and are protected by the tender care of the shepherds. Well nourished and secure believers are able to fully embrace and become personally confident to fully function as members of the believers' priesthood.

Many passages in the Old Testament speak of shepherds who have as their first concern their own needs and welfare and financial gain and not the needs of the sheep. These are known as hireling shepherds and Ezekiel 34 is a central passage. One of the clear cautions in the New Testament church is about those who are the false shepherds who place their own needs above those of the saints. Those who are in the "professional" ministry clearly face constraint in what they say. People who are offended by either the pastor or the truth of the Word of God will usually leave and take their wallets with them. Those who have a "Christian job" need to be paid. There is the added possibility that if the saints are expected to fully participate (I Cor. 14:26) in the meeting of the church, then the role of the **beloved ringmaster** may no longer be needed. As will be shown in this book, a *fully functioning priesthood of believers leads to a healthy well balanced body of believers*.

Problems? What problems?

Why would any Bible believing Christian suppose that the first place to seek a solution to perceived "church problems" might possibly be outside of God's Word? None could claim that even the Churches, presented in the New Testament had a lack of problems. But here is the rub. The problems which are addressed for solution are not organizational, or social, or community, or financial, or issues with the worship team, or the number of elders, or whether to be classical or contemporary, or pastor's salaries, or the color of the nursery, or even what material to use for daily vacation Bible school. The form and the function was never an issue on the pages of Scripture.

The New Testament goes to great lengths to describe what the church did when it met together and why.

There is never a hint that any of the above common issues which often divide people and churches today were ever issues to the early believers. The problems faced by the young churches, were *people problems*, not *organizational problems*. Organizational problems can never find a final Biblical solution, without God's direct input through the Scriptures. The early church already knew and understood the pattern for meeting, the method of leadership, and the participation model for the saints of God, and what to do when meeting, and how to reach out effectively to a lost and dying world. The efforts for correction and improvement in the body were always directed at improvement in personal holiness, effective servant hood, and more dynamic body life and participation in the meeting of the church.

When the Lord Jesus speaks to each of the Seven Churches in Revelation 2 and 3, He says to each Church, "*He, who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the Churches.*" It is not insignificant that when there is an important message to God's people, that it is often repeated. What did the Father say at the baptism of Jesus? "*This is my beloved Son, listen to Him.*" The work of the Holy Spirit according to Jesus is this, "*He shall take of mine and explain it to you.*" From the same writer, John, Jesus is recorded as saying "*my sheep hear my voice...*" Why then are solutions for failing and ineffective churches that are in conflict and turmoil sought from every source except the Word of God?

Candidly, I would say that my studied observation of both Scripture and Churches for more than 60 years indicates that an understanding of the Biblical model puts the Church on the corner in full jeopardy of being contrary to what is said about the Church in Scripture. In several recent long term conversations with pastor friends, who openly acknowledged what Scripture says about leadership, the believers' priesthood and the gathering of the saints, they made a surprising admission.

They all generally said that "if I acknowledge the pattern presented in Scripture then I will have to stop being in charge of everything, get a job, and allow the

congregation to participate in the meeting of the Church.” Several said that they were too old to learn a *new job*, one was certain his wife wouldn’t approve, and another said that the only other thing he knew was how to work on Bicycles, and admitted that the pay wasn’t very good. Those in the *Professional Ministry* might want to reconsider what the motivator really is for service in the kingdom of God and what place the almighty dollar has as an influence not only on the message preached, but the “*occupation*” chosen. It is well recognized (tongue in cheek) that we could have had a much larger New Testament if the Apostle Paul had not chosen to work for a living.

Leadership: “Would I still do this job even if I didn’t get paid?”

How many in the paid ministry today would be willing to teach and promote a view which makes their own role as “**beloved ringmaster**” irrelevant and unnecessary? In fact how many would be willing to submit to the clear and central teaching of what church leadership really is and what the role of the believer priest really is? Job security and the very idea of having to get a *real job* is frightening at its very core for those who have been taught to believe that it is *their right and calling* to be in paid leadership. There are many godly men and women who serve in the body of Christ today. Most of them would say that they have been “called into the ministry.” They and others however, have decided to divide the body of Christ into two distinct categories. There are those “in” and those “not in” the paid ministry. Not only are those two distinctions not found in Scripture, but to divide the body into a *priestly* and *non priestly* class leaves most believers out of the “ministry”.

The ordained and the un-ordained.

Seminary students are reminded many times during their training that when they go into a store to shop, or into a restaurant to eat, to ask for the “ministerial discount” because they are part of a special group of humans who have a special relationship and standing with God. They have a special role in the Church, and are extra deserving because of their sacrificial lifestyle. As a reminder and with a short explanation, let it be said that there is no separate category for those who spend more time and those who spend less time

sharing the Gospel and making disciples. In fact, there is clearly no group of individuals ever found in the New Testament who are elevated to a special position called the *ordained*. There is absolutely no group of individuals by the action of a committee or board or denomination, who become a **reverend** and are to be revered, held in higher esteem than others, or obtain special rank and privilege. Such a practice in the Church of God is not only un-Biblical but anti-Biblical as well and has dug an almost un-crossable chasm. There are no layers of separation between God and man since there is direct access into the holy of holies for everyone who is part of the believer priesthood because our “great high priest” is the “only mediator between God and man.” In the next chapter, let us move forward and take a look at the details of the believers’ priesthood in practice.

For comments or questions please email: info@FollowersOfJesus.info

Chapter 4

The Believer's Priesthood in Action

One Size Fits All

A friend of mine was surprised at my question about why his church sent all the children to the basement during the church service to play games, to color and do cardboard cut outs of Jesus and the Apostles, drink Kool-Aid and hear 5 minutes of the same Bible story about Daniel in the lion's den over and over. It seems that the church is divided on every level whether it is juniors, and seniors or children and adults, men and the women, recovering and not recovering and clergy and laity. Not many Bible concordances say much about the references to "children's church". My friend was even more amazed at my suggestion that children in the body of Christ have spiritual gifts, and are part of the priesthood, and the congregation might even benefit from their gifts and Spirit led participation in the meeting of the body. "*When you come together **each of you...***" Perhaps it is possible that the adults upstairs are drinking the same Kool-Aid being served downstairs as well. The priesthood of believers unites all true believers together serving in one body before the Lord.

How are the believer priests to serve God and the saints while in the world?

In Chapter 2 it is demonstrated that service to others and before the Lord by the Levitical and Aaronic priesthood has a corresponding pattern among believer priests. The wonderful good news is that not only is there a clear pattern of priestly duty and behavior in the Old Testament as was shown, there is the same priestly behavior pattern in the New Testament by all believers.

The lost doctrine of the Reformation, *the priesthood of the believer*, is clearly and openly taught and described in the New Testament. The most neglected and misunderstood part of that lost teaching concerns the seven sacrifices the believer priest is to offer up to the Lord. The ministry of sacrifice forms the center as well as the circumference for a balanced and normal Christian life, yet is virtually never mentioned from the pulpits of most churches. There may

however, be a brief reference to that doctrine in the common *statement of faith*, but most believers remain untaught and ignorant of the **what**, the **why**, and the **how**.

The sacrificial lifestyle

The sevenfold sacrifices of the believer priest form a sacrificial lifestyle. That kind of life is not limited simply to what one does at church, or in a Bible study, or at a prayer meeting. The priesthood is portable and practical and permanent and is designed to be fully in operation all the time and everywhere. As our great high priest, the Lord Jesus, was **a man for others**, and also our model, the believer is to be the man for others. Some very important characteristics of that lifestyle of priestly behavior can be gleaned from a close look at Hebrews 4 and 5. That **man** has: 1. A godly calling. 2. A ministry of mediation for others. 3. A person who intercedes for others. 4. Is tender and gentle and understanding of others. 5. Confident in God's presence. 6. Submissive and obedient to God.

A person can know the price of everything, and the cost of nothing

The genuine priest in Luke 10 was the Good Samaritan. He was willing to endure the inconvenient and not account for the cost. For the average evangelical, the highest level of suffering is inconvenience, and everything has a price. To be a genuine believer means to know we are *not only called to believe on Him but to suffer for His sake*. He also knows that he who has *counted all things but loss*, has nothing else to lose.

The genuine believer priest never raises himself above others, but as Jesus did, *empties himself* and became *like his brothers in every way*, and is willing and able to touch and be touched.

1. The sacrifice of praise

The central passage and starting place for looking at the sevenfold sacrifices of the believer priest is found in Hebrews 13:15-16

15 Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name. 16 And do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.

The word used here for *sacrifice* in the original language (θυσίαν), is the same word used through most of the Scriptures to speak of a sacrifice and offering to God. Jesus, being our Great High Priest, personally takes the *fruit of our lips*, and presents that offering to the Father. As the smoke of the offering rises continually, so does the *sacrifice of praise*. A favorite rabbinical saying goes, “In the future, all suffering will cease, but thank offerings will never cease.” Continual praise is neither optional nor occasional. The phrase, “let us continually offer”, is an horatory subjunctive, that is, kind of a collective command in which the writer includes himself and removes this act of praise from the realm of the optional. The suggestion is that the praise is a corporate activity, but still incumbent on each believer.

The *sacrifice of praise* is a thank offering. (cf. Psalm 34:1; 50:14,23;100:4;116:1). As a man centers on who God is, what He is like, and what He has done, the result is an attitude of gratitude, and a heart full of the sacrifice of praise. The believer, who is focused on praising God, has no time or interest to be distracted by the failure of others or his own perceived misery.

His name reveals who He is

Since the *fruit of our lips* is praise, then the root must be a heart fixed on God and His *name*. His name tells us who He is as to His character, authority, attributes and power and becomes the focus of adoration and praise. God has revealed Himself by and through His name. The Scripture reveals at least twenty one different names by which God is called. The names of God reveal who He is. It is impossible to have a relationship with a person, if one doesn't know who He is. By knowing God's names we learn who He is. Personal praise directed toward God must be based on a personal relationship.

I have heard from so many of my fellow Christians that at times, God seems so very far away and even sometimes unknowable. Living where God lives and

enjoying His company and presence come out of learning to *offer up the sacrifice of praise and giving thanks to His name*. Psalm 22:3 says that God *lives in the praises of His people*. Do you want to live where God lives? Do you want God to live where you live? The closing verse of the Psalms is an exhortation: “*Let everything which has breath praise the Lord. Praise the Lord.*” Praise should be as **normal** and as **necessary** as breathing. There is no life without breath and there is no genuine spiritual life without praise.

But doesn't it get old and boring after while?

The author tells us that *sacrifice of praise* is to be an offering that never ends and of which the fire of that offering never goes out. The little phrase used here, (διὰ παντὸς) gives the picture of something which never ceases, regardless of the circumstances. The idea is that in spite of and continuously through every situation, praise to God never stops. He is both the source and object of our praise. The fire on the altar of sacrifice should never be quenched.

Paul clearly taught that thanks and praise were to be offered up to God *for everything* (Eph. 5:20) and *in everything* (Philip. 4:6; I Thess. 5:18). To give thanks in everything is easy; to give thanks for everything is impossible. Genuine praise requires God as the source and substance. As a reminder, genuine praise comes from a heart that has a genuine relationship with God.

Practically speaking, praising and thanking God is never a performance, nor is a human audience required. Praise offered to God is always at least personal, private and intimate although it is sometimes corporate, public, and open. The praise spoken of in this central passage is the *fruit of lips* which means out loud if possible. God is not deaf. We are performers and a *spectacle* in the theatre of life (I Cor. 4:9) (θέατρον) *to the world, and to angels and to men*. They watch and listen and so do other believers. Who was listening as the Apostles sang hymns of thanks and praise in prison? *About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the rest of the prisoners were listening to them.* Acts 16:25

Praise to God will never be diluted nor diminished no matter how often it is poured out. It should never be uttered as simply a by-word or empty phrase. When we offer up *the sacrifice of praise*, we are honoring the One with whom we have a personal relationship and is our Redeemer who deserves far more praise than we can ever utter.

2. The Sacrifice of Practice

And do not neglect to do good... Hebrews 13:16 Yes it is true that the Gospel is holistic, because God does indeed care for the whole man, body, soul, and spirit. But unfortunately many who call themselves Christians, have allowed the *good to become the enemy of the best*. In many churches, making quilts, feeding the hungry, collecting toys for homeless children, cleaning up the neighborhood mess can easily become priorities over preaching the Gospel. Some claim that our “good deeds” will cause others to want to become Christians as we are. Others say it is our “social responsibility” to do good in the community. Never in Scripture does good works become a substitute for engagement with the Gospel message. Can there be a balance between practice and preaching? Yes, there can be, but in practice not often. What is the emphasis of Scripture and what is the model of Jesus, the Apostles, and the early Christians? There is little if any resemblance between the *practice* of the early church and today.

Good deeds done by those in the Covenant Community may, for some, become a self satisfying substitute for the Gospel imperative. If believer priests have Godly priorities in place, then there is never a conflict in what is of ultimate importance. Priorities never conflict. People usually do what is important to them.

Is there a balance?

Some have been criticized, and rightly so, for neglecting the personal and social needs of others who are not Christians; and rightly so. Others are guilty for attending to social concerns and neglecting the needs of the soul and salvation. God never shows doing good deeds as a substitute for obedience to

the Gospel imperative. When we do preach the Gospel, it is a Gospel to the whole man, but never without concern for the whole man. Even though they may see “*our good works, and glorify God...*, they cannot hear without a preacher.

What has God said about the normal priestly acts of doing good?

The good deeds of the believer priest please God “... so that you may live worthily of the Lord and please him in all respects - bearing fruit in every **good deed**, growing in the knowledge of God” Col. 1:10

“So we must not grow weary in **doing good**, for in due time we will reap, if we do not give up” Gal. 6:9

When good deeds are done as unto the Lord, they can be done as a *sacrificial* offering. Sometimes, however, the good deeds perhaps thought as done unto the Lord might be somewhat misplaced or misdirected. Sometimes Christians are fooled into believing what they are doing are genuine good deeds or that they have taken a genuine “mission trip” to help others, or the missionaries, or even believe they have been a junior missionary. The time cost, the financial cost, the misdirected effort, and the complete ignorance of what God wants can be very expensive. It is not impossible for a church group of 20 to go to another country and spend between 40 to 50 thousand dollars to get the “missionary experience.” Locally, that amount of money might be used to fund 10 indigenous believers to take an entire year off to reach out to their own countrymen, whose language they already speak, and enough to feed their own families and even provide Gospel materials.

Almost all those to whom we have spoken, who have done the “mission trip”, have said that they painted the church building, taught the locals how to play soccer, held a barbeque, assisted in daily vacation Bible school, or taught the locals a craft. We have asked many who have returned how God has been using them to reach out to that same ethnic group in the local community since they returned from the “mission trip.” We are still waiting for a response. The enemy loves it when Christians make “the good, the enemy of the best.”

When good works are done by Divine design, God receives the glory

When good works are sacrificially done truly “as unto the Lord”, and according to His plan, God receives the glory He deserves.

“For we are his workmanship, having been created in Christ Jesus for good works that God prepared beforehand so we may do them.” Eph. 2:10

James writes that our works demonstrate the genuine nature of our faith because a genuine faith works. *What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but does not have works? Can this kind of faith save him? James 2:14 “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith without works and I will show you faith by my works. James 2:18*

The Lord Jesus demonstrated that He was the Messiah by going about doing good works. Our Great High Priest left us with a servant-model. *“He went around doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, because God was with him.” Acts 10:38* Jesus was the man for others, and our good works, as a believer priest demonstrates the same. God has prioritized our priestly ministry of good works. As in the life of the Lord Jesus, our good works always are to be a means to an end and not an end in themselves. Everything Jesus did was to establish the absolute necessity of belief in Him and in the Gospel He preached. He never did earthly works without the accompaniment of the heavenly message. Paul also indicates in Galatians 6:10 that believers are to *“do good to all men, especially those of the household of faith.”* Our good works are prioritized to those who are fellow believers.

Peter also instructs the believer that we should never really regard the cost when doing what is good and right in the eyes of God. *“For it is better to suffer for doing good, if God wills it, than for doing evil.” 1Pet. 3:17* The example given was the greatest good work of all time, that of Jesus going to the cross.

3. The Sacrifice of the Purse

“and to share what you have, for God is pleased with such **sacrifices.**”

Hebrews 13:1

The word translated here as “share” (κοινωνία) and sometimes translated as *fellowship*, is simply a euphemism for giving your substance or money to others for their needs. Even though Jesus spoke about money as much or more than anything else, perhaps the greatest area of ignorance among Christians is the subject of giving. Sadly it must be acknowledged that in order for a “professional ministry” to exist and stay in operation, staff to be paid, and large building mortgages to be funded, then giving must be central to the message from the pulpit. The financial emphasis and needs of the “church on the corner” of today are never found on the wish list of the early church.

“For I have received everything, and I have plenty. I have all I need because I received from Epaphraditus what you sent – a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, very pleasing to God.” Philippians 4:18

What does the average man in the pew believe and do?

Most modern evangelicals believe that God holds them to a standard of the Old Testament *tithe*. In fact, when you ask most what they believe, they would say that the first ten percent should go to the needs of the Church, and that offerings go to some other need, such as missionaries or the building fund.

Under the New Covenant, the law of Moses is no longer in effect, except where it is *convenient* to keep it in place. Both Sabbath keeping and Tithing are often enforced and encouraged to meet a group agenda. The tithe, as presented under the law, was not voluntary but rather compulsory. And it was essentially a tax placed upon the Covenant Community for its operation and maintenance. Some scholars have suggested that there were times when the total of the required giving could equal as much as fifty five percent. The concept of giving, sometimes called the tithe, did not necessarily always mean a mere ten percent. Some churches routinely examine a member’s financial

record as part of the requirements of belonging to confirm that the tithe has been given. Others may use a heavy layer of guilt or promise that if a *seed offering* is given, God is obliged to return a multiple. Giving to get a financial return is never a promise in either Testament.

What are the giving standards under the New Covenant?

The central passages in the New Testament for giving financially are 2 Corinthians chapters 8-9, I Corinthians 1:1-3, and I Corinthians 16:2. There are many and significant differences between giving as practiced in the modern evangelical church and the giving standard and motivation found in the Scriptures. Virtually all the reasons presented by the modern church for giving are foreign to the Scriptures including the proposed use of that money. If the New Covenant standard was taught in the Church, the believers would know that giving is optional because it is **grace giving**, and large and complex organizations cannot be operated and maintained, if the money supply is uncertain and interruptible. Therefore there must be a dependable source of money for the *Church on the Corner* to pay down debt, cover salaries, make repairs, and provide utilities and supplies. Grace giving as taught on the pages of the New Testament is definitely *not a dependable means* of meeting those needs, and that is the major reason that Biblical giving standards are not taught. Members of the body are given the freedom not to give as well as the freedom to give. No believer is ever under compulsion.

The believer priest has a responsibility to listen to God about grace giving

Since the sacrifice of giving is a priestly work, then God's pattern, standard, and instructions must be honored before one can claim that giving is *unto the Lord*. If the priestly work of sacrifice under the Old Covenant is clear, precise, and consistent, then can we expect the New Testament giving standard for the believer priest be any less exact? The only prescriptions for amounts to be given under the New Covenant require the believer to "give (or not give) as God has blessed", to give anonymously, and to give with joyful loss of control of what we are stewards." *Each one of you should give just as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, because God loves a cheerful giver.*

“2Cor. 9:7 The original word for cheerful (ἡλαρόν), presents the idea of a cheerful abandon. After all, we are actually giving away someone else’s stuff, God’s stuff, of which we are only stewards.

The Christian world is full of false practices and motivations for giving which make false appeals and completely ignore Spirit motivated grace giving and in compliance of the faith principle both by the giver and the receiver. Here are several examples. One often hears the pious phrase, “This is a ministry of faith and we are depending on you for our support.” Not only is such a concept complete nonsense, but it is also completely contrary to the meaning and object of faith in Scripture. Nowhere should faith, placed in another person ever be considered as the source of supply for ministry. Nowhere in Scripture is any other Christian asked by another Christian, to supply the needs for his own personal ministry. In today’s Evangelical world, a prospective worker is told to go to various churches and present his needs which must be met, before his ministry can begin. The real question is, “would you respond to the call of God to this work, even if you didn’t get paid or had to support yourself with a job?” The Scripture clearly teaches that **God alone is sufficient for God’s own work.**

More often than not, every radio and TV “Christian” program has a repeated appeal to send money so the program is able to stay on the air. Incidentally, the largest social media outreach of teaching and training and cult ministry is supported by a single individual who has a day job and a night job and cares for two special needs children and never makes a single mention of the need for funds to keep going. He believes God is *Jehovah Jireh*, the *God who sees and supplies*. Someone has made up an announcement parody of what the radio or tv preacher is really saying: “Please keep those cards and letters coming folks, so we can keep asking for those cards and letters, and keep this program on the air.”

Where does the money go?

Some would measure the success of the Gospel in terms of the size of the building and the number of people attending the meetings. The size of the

crowd and the building projects are never a measure of God directed giving. For most, giving money to build a great building is called “building the Church.” According to Scripture, *Church is not a place where, but a people who.* “His body is the church...and God’s building.” (Col. 1:24, I Cor. 3:9). Vast fortunes have been spent to house great crowds, provide activities to keep the Christians busy and entertained, operate the daycares, to run the programs, and even house the treasures. Many think that the great or small buildings called “churches” are to house the activities to keep the Christians occupied and happy. Couldn’t the money be more effectively spent in teaching, training, and equipping the saints? The answer is in the question. The Biblical emphasis is in not building the biggest pile of Christians, but infecting the world with the message.

The great missionary C.T. Studd said: “Some wish to live within the sound of Church or Chapel bell; but I want to run a rescue shop, within a yard of hell.”

Giving to the workers, the poor, and the widows

Before we can understand to whom and why we can give in the true Biblical sense, we need to look at what Scripture really says about *God directed giving*. The emphasis in Scripture is on giving to individuals rather than to support large organizations or building projects. The priorities are giving to genuine widows, to workers who labor in word and doctrine, and to poor believers.

“Elders who provide effective leadership must be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard in speaking and teaching. For the scripture says, “Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain,” and, ‘The worker deserves his pay’.” I Tim 5:17-18 Both from the text of Scripture, and from the writings of the Church Fathers early on, there is never any hint that this verse means that one man called the “pastor of the Church” is paid to be in charge of all the ministry and as said earlier on, to be considered the *beloved ringmaster*. Service to others and leadership, is never known as a **Christian job and a paid vocation**.

The poor in the body of Christ may have their needs met by fellow believers.” *At the present time, your abundance will meet their need, so that one day their abundance may also meet your need, and thus there may be equality, as it is written: “The one who gathered much did not have too much, and the one who gathered little did not have too little.”* 2Cor. 8:14-15 As the context of the entire passage explains in detail, learning to give is as important as learning to receive. One of the key words here is “equality”. Some have been blessed more financially and some less. Our true bond in Christ and compassion for others is shown when we don’t leave our brothers in need. The key word here, *equality*, even suggests that “when the plate gets to the end of the row, it should be empty.” *You will be enriched in every way so that you may be generous on every occasion, which is producing through us thanksgiving to God, because the service of this ministry is not only providing for the needs of the saints but is also overflowing with many thanks to God.”* 2Cor. 9:12

Paul never promoted any sort of enforced communalism nor economic egalitarianism. What is presented is a Spirit led economic sensitivity and interdependency in which members could learn both to give and receive financially. Nothing demolishes pride quicker than for those who have had much, to learn how to receive when in need. Learning to give implies learning how to make more room in one’s purse. In Romans 12:8, giving is a spiritual gift as well. The gift of giving also has a built in ability to get as well. A generous believer learns as he gives more to be more effective and wise in his giving as a sacrifice offering to God.

God commends Cornelius in his generous priestly response to the need of the poor brothers. *“Staring at him and becoming greatly afraid, Cornelius replied, “What is it, Lord?” The angel said to him, “Your prayers and your acts of charity have gone up as a memorial before God.”* Acts 10:4

Down through the history of the Church, true believers have taken care of each other, especially those who were having short term and even long term emergent needs. But help and financial support was never given carelessly nor without a careful evaluation of a person’s life, belief, and behavior. “Honor

widows who are truly in need.” 1 Tim. 5:3 The balance of the passage through verse 16 encourages and endorses the support of those with genuine needs, with a careful accountability and responsibility.

Financial help and support for the 3 groups mentioned above, in need, is always considered to be grace giving, and never described according to some measured amount. Grace giving is always with cheerful abandon to the will of God.

When giving is by the Spirit’s direction, God can bless as well as multiply

The poor widow, about whom Jesus spoke, did not give “out of what she had,” but gave “according to what she had.” She recognized the principle that God owns everything. The others mentioned in the passage measured their giving. She gave unmeasured, because she gave everything she had. Often, in an effort to minimize and soften what she did, we attempt to call the story the *Widow’s Mite*. In reality, the story is about the *Widow’s Mites*. We want to minimize what she has done so we can applaud her for her great stewardship, and allow her to hold something in reserve, in case she ran into hard times. She recognized God as her source and supply. Again the issue is *little is much when God is in it*. The real story is about the widows *mites*. Again the question we must ask God is not: “how much should I give, but how much should I keep.”

When giving is in response to listening to God, then the amount is not the issue. Little is much, when God is in it. Jesus took a little boy’s lunch, and fed the thousands. God kept filling the widow’s jars with oil until she ran out of jars. She recognized the principle that in obedience, *we cannot out-give God*.

We reap what we sow

“My point is this: The person who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the person who sows generously will also reap generously. Each one of you should give just as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, because God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace overflow to you so that because you have enough of everything in every way at all times, you

will overflow in every good work. Just as it is written, ‘He has scattered widely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness remains forever’.” 2Cor. 9:6-9

It might be said that there is a *rule of reciprocity*, in which God loves to give back and keep refilling the cup of the believer who keeps pouring out to others. God assumes the responsibility to resupply what we are willing to supply to others.

General principles learned from the central passages on sacrificial grace giving

Much space has been given to the sacrifice of the purse because sacrificial grace giving is such a largely misunderstood topic by the average church member. Books could be written to correct the abuses and to present the Biblical pattern. We present in the following and without comment, some of the giving principles derived by a careful exposition of the Biblical texts on giving. With careful study and Biblical exegesis, more can be added to the list. As one learns the meaning of sacrificial grace giving, an entirely new joy may become a substantial part of the ministry of the believer priest. The reader is personally challenged to “examine the Scriptures daily”, and see how many more principles may be added to the list.

1. Graciously
2. Faithfully
3. Purposely
4. Regularly
5. Willingly
6. Cheerfully
7. Personally
8. Proportionally
9. Voluntarily
10. Anonymously

4. The Sacrifice of the Person

“Therefore I exhort you, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a sacrifice - alive, holy, and pleasing to God - which is your reasonable service”. Romans 12:1

The fear of death, in any form, whether it is fear of old age, financial loss, disappointment in love and the death of a relationship, some kind of terminal disease, all have a continual influence on how we live. People through the ages have had an uncomfortable fear of death in any form. The ancients made sure that the deceased had food with him for the afterlife and often went to elaborate means and rituals to insure that the dead person was welcomed into the next stage of life. Others believe that the soul continues to live on in some form, even if as a grasshopper. Elaborate funerals are held to impress the living at the worthiness of the one honored. In many churches, the clergyman at the funeral will often “preach the deceased into heaven.” Most of us will hang on to life as long as possible, even if it means going bankrupt on medical costs or spending and extending our last moments in hospice.

Human viewpoint and Divine viewpoint, when it comes to the values and priorities of life, are in direct conflict. The Lord Jesus, who calls all believers to a life of discipleship, has a completely different priority and emphasis than the average Church member.” *For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what does it benefit a person if he gains the whole world but forfeits his life? Or what can a person give in exchange for his life?”* Matt. 16:25 The more desperately we hang onto what God has said we must release to Him, the more we have to lose. Again we must ask, *can God be trusted in such a way, that if He should fail, all would be lost?”*

Human viewpoint and Divine viewpoint have nothing in common

As a believer priest, we are called upon to offer sacrifices to God. Perhaps the most difficult sacrifice to offer up to God is that of ourselves, and the easiest simply to sing about. The one offered up on the altar is considered as good as dead. It is not normal to embrace death. *“As it is written, ‘For your sake we*

encounter death all day long; we were considered as sheep to be slaughtered.’ No, in all these things we have complete victory through him who loved us!” What is the one event which must precede resurrection and new life? That which comes before is death. No sacrifice every escaped alive from the altar. Believers continue alive, but alive in Christ, with new life, and as a new creation.

The One who *gave His life as a ransom for the many*, established the priestly pattern for all the redeemed in offering Himself up for us all. Through His entire earthly life, Jesus spoke of Himself as the committed sacrifice. He said: *“for this purpose I came into the world.”* He Himself was the wheat grain which fell into the ground to die, and to rise again. *“I tell you the solemn truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains by itself alone. But if it dies, it produces much grain. The one who loves his life destroys it, and the one who hates his life in this world guards it for eternal life. If anyone wants to serve me, he must follow me, and where I am, my servant will be too.”* John 12:24-26

When the wheat grain falls into the ground, it has surrendered control. The future is now decided. There is no rescue, not alternative outcomes. Neither is there a parachute nor safety net.

An offering becomes a sacrifice when it dies.

Peter calls us to *“follow in His steps.”* Resurrection was His guarantee and it is ours as well. As Paul said in Galatians 2:20: *“I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So the life I now live in the body, I live because of the faithfulness of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”* There was no turning back. As Oswald Chambers said: ***“Beware of refusing to attend the funeral of your own independence.”*** Paul viewed his own life as a sacrifice poured out on God’s altar. *“But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice together with all of you.”* Philip. 2:17

God is well pleased with a life poured out in sacrifice to Him. Unbelievable as it may seem, the believer can relax on the altar of sacrifice, even though it is the place of death. When Abraham headed up the mountain with Isaac to offer him

up on the altar, he said to his servants: “We will worship and then return to you.” Genesis 22:5 Abraham believed in resurrection, and so do we.

The giving of self, the greatest act of sacrifice, is called *Spiritual Worship*, in Romans 12:1. The original language presents the picture of serving in God’s temple. It speaks of our role before God and men, and is a **result** of presenting ourselves of God’s altar. The order is always the same: sacrifice, resurrection, and then service. To be a sacrifice on God’s altar is never a blind leap of faith into oblivion. It is rather an act of trust and obedience in both the command and promise of God. When we take our hands off of what is given to die, God raises it to life and service.

5. The Sacrifice of Prayer

“... ..and when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders threw themselves to the ground before the Lamb. Each of them had a harp and golden bowls full of incense (which are the prayers of the saints).”

Revelation 5:8

*“Another angel holding a golden censer came and was stationed at the altar. A large amount of incense was given to him to offer up, with the prayers of all the saints, on the golden altar that is before the throne. The smoke coming from the incense, along with the prayers of the saints, ascended before God from the angel’s hand. Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and threw it on the earth, and there were crashes of thunder, roaring, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake.”*Revelation 8:3-4

God views prayer that comes up to Him as a sacrificial temple offering. Prayer is a priestly ministry that requires right standing before God to be effective and acceptable to God. The prayers offered up to God should not be offered to Him to overcome His reluctance, but to appeal to His willingness.

God’s ear is open to the prayers of His children

The Bible clearly says that God loves to hear from His children and listens to the requests of His own who are walking in fellowship with him and “we know that

He hears us.” When one looks at the basic meaning of the words used in the New Testament most often translated prayer, or appealing to God to do something, all have a basic meaning of asking or requesting something. Prayer is the method by which believers ask God. Prayer is not, as one well known writer said, *conversation with God*.

Paul writing to Timothy said: ” *First of all, then, I urge that requests, prayers, intercessions, and thanks be offered on behalf of all people, even for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. Such prayer for all is good and welcomed before God our Savior.*” 1 Tim. 2:1-3

The word used here for *prayers* (προσευχὰς), is the most common and comprehensive word used in English for prayer, and commonly speaks of addressing someone we regard as superior and in Scripture always refers to addressing God. The focus is upon the God who listens and supplies.

In this classic passage, the use of *requests* (δεήσεις), commonly speaks to the issue of asking for a need to be met or to obtain something that is necessary. It can be on behalf of yourself or others.

The picture behind the word *intercession* (ἐντεύξεις), is one of meeting with someone to ask for their help in a matter. The word was often used in the ancient world when appealing to a superior or one of rank such as a king.

Notice how Paul asks that believers who pray have an attitude of gratitude and that thanksgivings (εὐχαριστίας) be given to God. Some would say, I am *thankful*, but to give thanks is a transitive verb, and takes a direct object. God is the object of our thankfulness, whether our thanks is for answered prayer, or for the privilege of praying, or the opportunity of knowing God, or for the person himself for whom we are praying, or even in the anticipation that He will and does answer us.

One more word used quite often in the New Testament for praying is the word (αἰτέω} meaning simply just to ask. It is used over 70 times. One of the classic passages is of course found in Matthew 7:7-8: “*Ask and it will be given to you;*

seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened...” Since the word *ask* is in the present imperative, we could really read this as saying to “keep asking”. There is a certain persistence God is looking for in us and a certain tenacity we should be looking for in ourselves”. Space doesn’t allow for a complete exposition of this concept, but with tongue in cheek, we might say: *Don’t put all your begs in one askit.*

There is no question that the prayers of the saints go up before God as a sweet smelling incense and that as believer priests we have another privilege of making another offering to our God out of gratitude and desire to please Him His way and to bring Him glory. Our standard bearer and model of priestly prayer is that which is found in John 17 in the real “Lord’s prayer.” Through His entire earthly ministry and into His present ministry for us at the Father’s right hand, His entire focus was and is on interceding for His children. He has given us the perfect model on which to focus as priests of God in caring for and about the needs of others.

6. The Sacrifice of Preaching the Gospel

There is no question that for the Christian, reaching others with the Gospel is central to obedience and necessary for balance in a believer’s life. Paul’s perspective on the value and purpose of his Gospel outreach is a much different view than what is commonly held by most believers. He taught that those to whom he preached were themselves, an offering to God. *“But I have written more boldly to you on some points so as to remind you, because of the grace given to me by God to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles. I serve the gospel of God like a priest, so that the Gentiles may become an acceptable offering, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.”* Romans 15:15-16

The very act of evangelizing was a priestly offering in the service of God. The people to whom Paul preaches are an offering to God. He also considered himself to be part of the offering process because he was, in his own eyes, expendable for the sake of the Gospel. Those to whom he preached were not

simply a statistic of a campaign or outreach effort to impress others of a great preacher's success, but truly an acceptable sacrifice offered up to God.

Little can be written here, which has not been said already. God has called and commissioned *all believers* to preach the Gospel and to *fish for men*. No exceptions are made for gifting or ability. The Gospel call is incumbent on all believers to purposefully and confidently communicate their faith.

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is God’s power for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek...For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is God’s power for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.” Romans 1:14, 16

All believers know that we owe a love debt to God for redeeming us. All believers have been called to tell others the Good News. All believers have the model from the Lord Jesus and the Apostles to intentionally share their faith with others. **God’s commands are God’s enabling.**

7. Participating in the meal of the sacrifice

“We have an altar that those who serve in the tabernacle have no right to eat from.” Hebrews 13:10

The priests under the Old Covenant economy had a right to eat of the food sacrificed on God's altar. As a believer priest, there is a right to eat from the Altar of Sacrifice as well. But it is a different Altar. They ate from the altar which anticipated and prefigured, and was a shadow of the sacrifice of The Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world. We eat from the Altar of Remembrance of the Lamb's finished and acceptable sacrifice. And of course as Jesus instructed Paul, the believer is to “keep doing this in remembrance of me.”

The table of the Lord

“Is not the cup of blessing that we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread that we break a sharing in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread,

we who are many are one body, for we all share the one bread. Look at the people of Israel. Are not those who eat the sacrifices partners in the altar? Am I saying that idols or food sacrificed to them amount to anything? No, I mean that what the pagans sacrifice is to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be partners with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot take part in the table of the Lord and the table of demons.”
 I Corinthians 10:16-21

Paul makes abundantly clear that there is a participation, a fellowship, and a genuine spiritual connection when one feasts at either the Lord’s table or the demons’ table. There is a reality of a joint sharing in the spirit world of either light or darkness. Real fellowship in the body is eating the bread together from the altar of remembrance. Real fellowship in the blood is drinking together of the cup of the new covenant. It is not, contrary to common experience, coffee and rolls in the basement after church. Our participation is with the Lord Himself and with each other.

The Table of the Lord is an altar for remembering

Most people are surprised at the term *table of the Lord* has its roots in a reference to the Altar of Sacrifice in Malachi. “A son naturally honors his father and a slave respects his master. If I am your father, where is my honor? If I am your master, where is my respect? The Lord who rules over all asks you this, you priests who make light of my name! But you reply, “How have we made light of your name?” You are offering improper **sacrifices on my altar**, yet you ask, “How have we offended you?” By treating the **table of the Lord** as if it is of no importance! For when you offer blind animals as a sacrifice, is that not wrong? And when you offer the lame and sick, is that not wrong as well? Indeed, try offering them to your governor! Will he be pleased with you or show you favor?” asks the Lord who rules over all. But now plead for God’s favor that he might be gracious to us. “With this kind of offering in your hands, how can He be pleased with you?” asks the Lord who rules over all.” Malachi 1:6-9

When a believer approaches the altar of remembrance, the table of the Lord, he is under the same obligations as those who offered the original sacrifice on

the Altar. Those priests were required to have right standing with God, a respectful attitude, and a true appreciation of the value of the sacrifice. The priests in this Malachi passage had a worldly and casual view of the sacrifice and a disrespectful attitude toward the high and holy God.

“For this reason, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. A person should examine himself first, and in this way let him eat the bread and drink of the cup. For the one who eats and drinks without careful regard for the body eats and drinks judgment against himself. That is why many of you are weak and sick, and quite a few are dead. But if we examined ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned with the world.”

Paul warns believers who are gathered for the Eucharist, that as believer priests, they need to have the same personal holiness and respect for the sacrifice as those priests under the Old Covenant. The priest who profanes the sacrifice offering would face the Lord’s judgment and discipline. The same warning is given to the one who participates in eating at the communion table. God regards the gathering of the saints as such a holy moment, that disregard and disorder can even lead to the discipline of death.

Cracker crumbs and thimbles of grape juice

Most Christians, when asked, have very little if any understanding of the significance, the context, the background or history of the gathering of the Church to eat at the Lord’s Table. For most it is an act, or a ritual, or an ordinance, or something “we are supposed to do” every quarter or so. For most it is a solemn and formal occasion even bordering on the somber. Some see it as a means of *special grace*, because in doing this act, we gain some favor from or receive a special blessing from God because of our participation. Others view the Communion as *special means of grace*, in which it is simply tradition done because “our church does it”, but it doesn’t give us any further standing with God.

Incidentally, there really is an element of grace in the celebration of eating at the altar. Jesus said, “*Whenever you do this, keep on doing this in remembrance of me.*” The emphasis is the remembering, not the keeping of a regular schedule. God’s grace is seen in this: **the reason for our gathering is our forgetting and the basis for our gathering is our remembering.**

The early church came to the Lord’s Table with a rich historical, religious, and cultural understanding of the believers gathering to feast together with the Lord and before the Lord. Token food and drink played no role whatsoever in the history of Israel or in the life of the early church. Full meals eaten with a special purpose in mind was always the order of the day whether with the few or many; whether it was a national feast, or the gathering of a few friends. The Feasts of Israel were actually feasts for the purpose of celebrating, remembering, and offering. The Last Passover actually became the first Lord’s Supper.

The Angel of the Lord feasted with believers

It is well established and accepted by most Bible scholars that the one individual known as The Angel of the Lord was the pre-incarnate Lord Jesus Christ. He continually shows up in the affairs of men and more often than not, ate a meal with those with whom He met. Once the Lord Jesus became incarnate at Bethlehem, His appearances as the Angel of the Lord ceased.

The Angel of the Lord would often appear to men to announce the plans and purposes of God, and to have a face to face meeting with God’s people. We will cite in the following, some of those encounters where The Angel of the Lord has fellowship and eats with men.

1. Melchizadek offers the sacrifice of bread and wine in a victory celebration of thanks to God. He was a type of Christ and a priest of the Most High God. Genesis 14:17-24
2. Abraham and Sarah share a meal with a divine visitor at the announcement of an heir. Genesis 18:1-8

3. Gideon offered a sacrifice to the Angel of the Lord at the announcement of victory in the battle with the Midianites. Judges 6:11-21
4. Manoah, the father of Samson, offered a meal unto the Lord when the Angel of the Lord announced the Birth of a Son. Judges 13

The hint of a pattern begins to emerge. An element of sacrifice and thanksgiving begins to emerge. The introduction of the bread and wine is fully revealed later by Jesus himself. The elements of sacrifice and thanksgiving are also introduced.

The meal became the a central part of Old Testament worship and sacrifice

1. The Passover meal became a central feast of Old Testament worship and sacrifice. It not only marked a new beginning for God's people but became The Memorial of God's deliverance and a new beginning. It was designed by God to show to them and to us the coming of the final Passover Lamb. It was a type and shadow of the coming reality. As already mentioned, the Last Passover actually became the first Lord's Supper. Exodus 12
2. Jethro worshipped and sacrificed to God for His deliverance of the Israelites." *Then Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, brought a burnt offering and sacrifices for God, and Aaron and all the elders of Israel **came to eat food** with the father-in-law of Moses before God.*" Exodus 18:12
3. Moses, the priests, and the elders ate and drank in celebration of God's covenant. Exodus 24:6-11
4. The three national feasts of Israel were central to the worship of God's people. Exodus 23:14-19

The feast of unleavened bread, the firstfruits, and the ingathering all were observed with a portion eaten and a portion sacrificed to God. In fact, every national feast of the Old Covenant typifies the Lord Jesus Christ by both example and revelation in the New Covenant.

5. Even the Peace Offering, just as the Lord's Supper, was a meal shared together by those in the Covenant Community. Leviticus 7 :11-15

6. Old Covenant Community members were called together by God to bring their offerings and sacrifices and in the presence of the Lord to eat together. Their gathering and sacrifice was considered by God as an act of worship. Deuteronomy 12:4-7

A kingdom of priests under the Old Covenant

God's chosen people were called to be a nation of priests and a holy nation. *"And now, if you will diligently listen to me and keep my covenant, then you will be my special possession out of all the nations, for all the earth is mine, and you will be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."* These are the words that you will speak to the Israelites." Exodus 19:5-6

God designed for His Kingdom of Priests the way He wanted to be worshipped, and a sequence of offerings, all of which reveal His majesty, lordship, and holiness. But all these feasts demonstrate that a meal together was a communal activity that caused the believers to have fellowship together, but also to focus on their God and what He had done for them. They were enabled not only to show their sacred loyalty, but their mutual trust and dependence as well.

The historical, religious, and cultural context for the new disciples of Jesus made it easier to understand what Jesus meant when said that He is the heavenly bread. He said that to eat of Him meant eternal life. He presented Himself as the bread and wine which gives eternal life and also as the Lamb of God who is the sacrifice for sin. He relates in John 6 that to come to Him means to eat, and to *believe* in Him means to drink. In I Corinthians 5:7 Christ is presented as our Passover who is sacrificed for us. The comparison was not lost on the early believers. All of the forefathers from the patriarchs forward were known to the average Jew for coming together to feast and celebrate their covenant relationship with God. It was an easy transition to the feast of remembrance.

The lessons learned from eating together in the life and earthly ministry of Christ

1. The feeding of the 5000 shows the abundant provision of God. In every instance in the New Testament, where Jesus joins others in and around a meal, He both teaches and reveals truth about his nature, character, and purpose. Matthew 14:15-21
2. The invitation to the wedding banquet was a clear picture of the call to salvation. It is banquet is a model of grace, faith, salvation, and of failure to respond to the host. God's election and selection of those invited demonstrate His sovereignty. *"Many are called, few are chosen."* Matthew 22:1-14.
3. The supper at Bethany is a beautiful retelling of the person and work of Christ. His Lordship of the universe is clear in His resurrection of Lazarus. His gracious attitude is seen as He receives an anointing from Mary. Dinner with the Savior displays the fellowship we have with Him and each other. Jn 12:1-11
4. Through all of His earthly ministry, the gathering together to eat, was often the context for the Lord Jesus to reveal more deeply about who He is and what He is doing. The last Passover became the first Lord's supper. God's New Covenant for the first time was on full and open display. The Old and the New were in stark contrast. There was only hope in the Old, but there was fulfillment in the New.

The bread and wine which they ate and drank at the Passover, give a clear representation of the sacrifice and offering from the heritage of the Jewish people. The Jews were accustomed to their use in the older system of worship. The disciples made the transition easily. It is easy for us to understand the familiar couplet, **"The New is in the Old concealed; The Old is in the New revealed."**

The pattern and practice of eating a sacrificial meal together was well established, even if not completely understood. By way of further study and

review, several passages add further light: Exodus 29:38-42, Numbers 15:1-10, chp. 28-29.

The final act of the Lord Jesus before his crucifixion, was to eat with His disciples. His first act after His resurrection, with His disciples, was to eat together. The final act of the Lord Jesus before His ascension, was to eat with His disciples. The first thing the disciples did together after the resurrection was to eat together. When the Lord Jesus speaks to the Seven Churches, He asks to come in and have supper with them. The first act of Jesus with the resurrected Church is to eat together at the marriage supper of the Lamb.

During His resurrection ministry with His disciples, Jesus had many lessons to teach the disciples as they gathered together to eat with one another.

1. Soon after his resurrection, the Lord Jesus joined several of his followers on the road to Emmaus. They did not recognize Him at the time until he broke bread with them at their evening meal. Not only was their blindness of His true identity revealed, but at the same time as He broke the bread, without doubt, they saw the nail prints in His hands. *“Then they told what had happened on the road, and how they recognized him when he broke the bread.”* Luke 14:13-35. As the Lord Jesus is “remembered” at the supper by the Church today, He still reveals Himself in and through the “breaking of bread.”
2. In John 21: 6-14 Jesus shows the true meaning of His incarnation in that He revealed His divine nature by omnisciently telling the disciples where to find the fish. He also showed forth His true humanity by carefully and personally preparing a breakfast on the beach. He had truly become “like His brothers.” As the incarnate one, He was man’s perfect God, and God’s perfect man, united in one person forever. The creator of all things, became their personal chef.
3. In Jesus’ final meeting with His disciples, again he ate a meal with them. In Acts 1:1-8 He gives again the Great Commission to reach the whole world with the Gospel, starting where they were in Jerusalem. In verse four in English, it is often translated as *“while He was with them.”*

Literally, in the original (συναλιζόμενος), the meaning is to “have salt with.” This is a common idiom in the ancient world meaning to eat together. Again, the disciples were enjoying a meal with a special revelation of and challenge from their Savior.

After Jesus ascended to the Father, the disciples ate together to remember their Savior

1. The breaking of bread was the first act of Church fellowship. *“They were devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.”* Acts 2:42 In the context of the passage, and in the context of Acts, and in the context of Early Church history, this *breaking of bread* was a “love feast.” The early church is seen in Acts as viewing the fellowship meal as central to the meeting of the Church and as a true memorial celebration of the Savior. In the original Greek, it is very easy to translate the passage as *fellowship* being defined as and containing the two elements of: *breaking of bread and prayers*.
2. Early on, the celebration of the Lord’s Supper and eating together was so important and central to the life of the Church, they ate a meal together daily. Soon in the early history of the Church, they began to eat together and remember the Lord on the first day of the week. *The institution of the gathering and eating was celebrated weekly rather than daily.” Every day they continued to gather together by common consent in the temple courts, breaking bread from house to house, sharing their food with glad and humble hearts...”* Acts 2:46
3. When Paul met with the disciples in Troas, it is clear from the original language that they met together “for the purpose” of breaking bread. The gathering was not just because they were hungry or needed a snack. *“On the first day of the week, when we met to break bread, (κλάσαι) Paul began to speak to the people, and because he intended to leave the next day, he extended his message until midnight.”* Acts 20:7 To *break* is an infinitive of purpose. In verse 11,

after they *broke bread* together, Paul taught the Word of God. This became a common pattern in the early life of the Church.

4. Paul taught the Corinthian Church that the *breaking of bread* is fellowship in the Body, and that the *drinking of the cup* together is fellowship in His blood. “*Is not the cup of blessing that we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread that we break a sharing in the body of Christ?*” I Corinthians 10:16
5. The breaking of Bread and the Drinking of the Cup at the meal of remembrance is the normal expression of remembering and honoring the Savior. Even early church history portrays the Church gathering for a Love Feast together. Not only was a meal eaten in common, but Spiritual Gifts were used for the mutual benefit and “building up” of one another, prayer was normal, and doctrinal and Biblical teaching were part of the gathering.

In Corinthians 10-14 much is said about what the Church does when it comes together. Many would claim that there really is no model for the church in the New Testament. They would say that God has left it up to the believer to gather and do what “seems right” and with whatever style is the most “acceptable” and “culturally relevant.” After all there are so many different styles and traditions all over the world. The model in the New Testament is relevant. Four times in this passage the phrase of gathering or coming together is used.

Apostolic practice was Apostolic precept, and Apostolic precept was Apostolic practice

The Apostles did what they taught and taught what they did. The model for the gathering of the Church is not an accident, but it is according to plan and purpose of God. If God desires “*glory to Himself in the Church*” (Ephesians 3:21), then who are we to make it up on the fly? God revealed to Moses that he should make all things in the Tabernacle, according to “*pattern showed him on the mountain.*”

(Hebrews 8:5) Should any less attention be given to God’s pattern for the Church?

When the believer priests gather to eat the memorial feast, and to use their gifts for mutual benefit and to pray and fellowship, it is not as spectators, but as participants. In the center of Paul’s instruction for the Church, he writes: *“What should you do then, brothers and sisters? When you come together, **each one** has a song, has a lesson, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all these things be done for the strengthening of the church.”* (I Corinthians 14:26) The Lord’s Table is the Lord’s Table. He is the one who has invited His church, and He is the one who tells us how to honor Him.

6. The Lord Jesus admonished all seven of the Churches in Revelation 2 and 3: *“The one who has an ear had better hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”* In speaking to the Church of Laodicea, which many see as representing the final days of the Church age, He is knocking on the door. He is asking to be invited into the congregation to eat with them. The meal he wants to eat with them is His supper. The church has ceased meeting for the Memorial Feast and they have excluded the guest of honor. The original text speaks of the main meal of the day and not just a “squat and gobble” experience, nor of broken cracker pieces and thimbles of juice. To eat (δειπνήσω) comes from the same root word used to refer to the Lord’s Supper and in other places in the New Testament. Several clear examples are in I Corinthians 11:20 of the Lord’s Supper and in John 13:2 of the Passover.
7. In eternity, the first action of Jesus with the glorified Church is to bring all his own to a great supper together with Him, The Marriage Supper of the Lamb. This meal marks the consummation of the relationship between Christ and His Bride, the Church. Then the angel said to me, *“Write the following: Blessed are those who are invited to the banquet at the wedding celebration of the Lamb!”* Revelation 19:9

Custom without Truth, is error grown old--- Tertullian

Dear reader, we realize that most of the things you have read in this short effort are either new, unfamiliar, or even seem foreign to your understanding of your normal experience as a typical church member. The *lost doctrine* of the Reformation, the priesthood of all believers, is truly the only hope for the revitalization of an effective and powerful and fruitful Church. You are challenged to be a Berean in your study and consideration of what is written, and “*search the Scriptures to see if these things are so.*” If they are “so”, then all of us find it incumbent to obey the precepts and patterns which God has revealed to us, regardless of the consequences.

His glory in the Church is our highest goal and obeying His love letter to us, this guidebook to the Supernatural, is our greatest desire. We ask personally that if this study is flawed and misrepresents what God has shown and said, we ask for correction of all misleading which has been written. Error must be exposed and corrected and truth must be shouted from the housetops.

Soli Deo Gloria – “To God alone be the Glory”

We hope this work has helped you grow closer to the Lord.

We would love to hear from you.

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