

“A Royal Priesthood”

2nd Corinthians 5: 11 – 6:1, John 15: 1 – 17; **1st Peter 2: 4 - 10 (Sermon)**

Have you ever thought of yourself as a priest? Well, if you are a Christian, you are a priest. 1st Peter was written to Christians and verse 9 tells us; **“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.** You became a priest because Jesus chose you to be a priest. Not only are you a priest but you belong to a royal priesthood because we serve Jesus The King of Kings and The Lord of Lords.

Since we are all priests, we need to know what our responsibilities are as a priest of The Living God. We can get a better understanding of what our duties and responsibilities are as New Testament priests by looking at the duties of a priest in The Old Testament.

The Hebrew word for priest means one who has to do with Divine matters. The Greek word for priest means one who is consecrated and engaged in holy matters. In Numbers 3:3 we read that God choose and anointed Aaron and his sons to be priests. In Old Testament times a person could only become a priest if they was a descendant of Aaron. John 15:6 records Jesus’ words; **“You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit – fruit that will last.”** And in 1st Peter 2:9 we read that you became a priest because Jesus chose you to be a priest. Leviticus 8:5-9 tells us that when an Old Testament priest was consecrated or made holy; they washed, took off their old clothes, and were given new priestly garments. Blood was applied to their right ear, their right thumb, and their right big toe symbolizing that they were being made holy from top to bottom by the blood. In the same way today, as Christians we are consecrated for our priesthood by discarding our old sinful garments and clothed with the righteousness of Jesus Christ. We are made holy and clean by being washed in the blood of Jesus Christ. If you are a Christian, you are a royal priest in service to our Lord Jesus Christ.

Two of the **main** duties of an Old Testament priest were to offer sacrifices that were acceptable to God **and** to pray for the people. God gave very specific instructions for carrying out priestly responsibilities. In Numbers 28:2 we read that the burnt offerings provided a pleasing aroma to The Lord. The Jewish people had certain days when they would come to the tabernacle or to the temple to worship. They would bring their sacrifices to the priest and wait in the courtyard while the priest entered the Holy Place to offer their sacrifice to God. Animal sacrifices were brought in order to receive God’s forgiveness and blessings.

The entire Old Testament sacrificial system was replaced when Jesus voluntarily became the ultimate sacrifice for all people who claimed Him as their savior. When Jesus died on the cross Matthew 27:51 tells us that the curtain in The Temple separating the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place was torn from top to bottom. This was symbolizing that the priests who had been forbidden from entering the Most Holy Place could now come in. Hebrews 4:16 tells us to **“approach the throne of grace with confidence so that we can receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”** Today we do not have to go through a priest to come before Almighty God because of what Jesus has done for us and Jesus is our great high priest. Today, as Christians we can worship God without having to go to a particular place or church building. In 1st Corinthians 3:16 we are told that our bodies are **“God’s Temple.”** As priests we are always on duty and we should worship God in all that we do and all that say each and every day. That is why verse 5 of 2nd Peter tells us that as priests we are to **“offer spiritual sacrifices pleasing to God.”** So the question becomes **“How can I offer sacrifices pleasing to God if Jesus completed all of the sacrificial requirements.”** First of all a spiritual sacrifice always involves a selfless attitude given with the intent of pleasing God. Whenever you offer a sacrifice of your time, your talents, and / or your possessions to God you are **“offering a spiritual sacrifice pleasing to God”**. A spiritual sacrifice pleasing to God also includes sharing the gifts that God has freely given

to you with someone who is in need. Jesus said; ***“Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.”*** (Matthew 25:40) This also includes sharing the good news of Jesus with the unsaved, befriending the friendless, sharing your time with a lonely person, offering encouragement to someone who is discouraged, and offering intercessory prayers for those in need. As New Testament priests we are to offer spiritual sacrifices pleasing to God and we are to pray for the people. Christians are commanded to ***“pray with out ceasing”*** (1st Thessalonians 5:17) and to ***“let our light so shine before men”*** (Matthew 5:15) and ***“in all things to give thanks”*** (1st Thessalonians 5:18). Our priestly role also requires us to ***“pray for one another”*** (James 5:16) and to ***“bear one another’s burdens”*** (Galatians 6:2)

In verse 9 of 1st Peter we read that we as priests are to ***“declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light.”*** We declare the praises of God when we remember God’s saving power in our lives and when we tell other people about God’s saving grace through Jesus Christ. We declare the praises of God when we share what God is doing in our daily life. We declare the praises of God when we give Him the credit for providing for us and for protecting us. We declare the praises of God when we proclaim Jesus second coming. Remember praising God is not limited to 11:00 am worship at Church on Sunday morning. We are to praise God in all that we do and say each and every day. One of our most meaning praise is obeying all of our Lord’s commandments. Remember Jesus said; ***“if you love me you will obey all of my commandments.”*** (John 14:15) Spiritual sacrifices include praise, prayer, thanksgiving, and living a holy life.

Deuteronomy 17:8 & 9 tells us that the priest were responsible for protecting *The Book of The Law*, teaching The Law, and explaining The Law to the people. The Levites also served as judges in cases involving difficult decisions. Today each one of us as priests have the responsibility to know what God’s word says and to teach others how God’ word applies to us today. We are all expected to defend God’s word when people twist The Truth to suit what they want to do. Each one of us has the responsibility to ensure that God’s Word is preached and taught in our church. Jesus gave all of His disciples the command to spread the Good News of The Gospel to the unsaved people around us. (Matthew 28: 19 – 20) We are all commanded to be His witnesses for Jesus. (Acts 1:8)

In Leviticus 6:12-13 we read that the priests were responsible for keeping the fire on the alter burning at all times. As New Testament priests we all have the responsibility to keep the flames on the altar of our hearts going strong. We all need to be passionate about our relationship with The Lord. We all have to make a conscious effort to stay on fire for The Lord and the only way we can do that is by reading and studying God’s word every day, praying every day, praising God every day, and worshipping and fellowshiping with other Christians every Sunday. We all need to be like Jeremiah the prophet who said; ***“His word is in my heart like a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed I cannot”*** (Jeremiah 20:9) None of us want to be rebuked by The Lord who warned the church at Ephesus; ***“I hold this against you: you have forsaken your first love.”*** (Revelation 2: 4)

In Numbers 1 & 2 we read that the priest had the responsibility for maintaining and protecting The Tabernacle. Today as priests we all have the responsibility for cleaning, maintaining, and protecting our church building. We all should be ashamed when there is trash on the church lawn or left in the pews after church. We all should be ashamed when The Lord’s House needs to be cleaned or something needs to be repaired. When The Lord’s House is dirty or things need to be repaired we are all guilty of neglecting our duty as a priest of The Lord God Almighty. In 1st Corinthians 6:19 we are told that our bodies are the temple of The Holy Spirit. So as priests we also have a responsibility to maintain, protect, and keep our spiritual temples clean. And we keep our spiritual temple clean by resisting temptation and Satan as well as continually repenting of our sins.

Numbers 1 & 2 also tells us that The Tribe of Levi was responsible for dismantling, carrying, and erecting the Tabernacle each time God told the children of Israel to move as they traveled through the wilderness on the way to The Promised land. The four Levites carrying The Arc of The Covenant always led the people as they traveled and as they went to war. Today as New Testament priests we all have the responsibility to lead the people in battling all forms of evil, idolatry, loose morals, and worldliness.

The priests in The Old Testament had a duty to serve and for the most part they took their priestly duties seriously. Think what would happen at Hamilton Presbyterian and in our neighborhood if every member of Hamilton Presbyterian took our duty to serve as priests seriously. We all have been called to serve and we all have many opportunities to serve, but sadly many people in the church have chosen to neglect their duty to serve. We all might not have the same passion or the same talents but we all need to find an area of service where God can use us. God is definitely not honored when we neglect our priestly responsibilities. God does not want a few priests among His people, God wants a priesthood of all believers. As Christians we are all called to serve as priests of The Living God.

God takes our duties and responsibilities as a priest very seriously. Remember Nadab and Abihu in Leviticus 10? Nadab and Abihu were the oldest sons of Aaron and they had been were set apart as priests. Nadab and Abihu did not follow God's commandments for burning incense in the tabernacle and God immediately struck them dead. In 1st Samuel 2 we read about Eli's sons taking some of the people's sacrifices for themselves and God took their life and He severely punished Eli for not correcting his sons. The Lord severely punished Aaron and his sons for making the Golden Calf while Moses was up on Mt Sinai. 3000 Israelites were killed that day and The Lord struck the people with a plague. Also on that same day The Lord chose and consecrated The Tribe of Levi to serve as priests. (Exodus 32) Then in 1st Samuel 15 we read about King Saul disobeyed God's command about offering sacrifices. God sent the Prophet Samuel to King Saul with these words; ***"Because you have rejected the word of The Lord He has rejected you as king."***

As Christians we all have been chosen by God and we have been consecrated by the blood of Jesus Christ to be priests of The Living God. We are not priests because of our physical lineage, but we are priests because of our spiritual lineage and our spiritual birth into Christ. God's word to us today is clear. As Christians we are all to take our role and responsibilities as priests very seriously and we are to joyfully fulfill all of our duties as a priest of The Living God. **AMEN**