



The Priesthood of Believers

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Scriptures are printed verbatim with references noted but highlights and underlines are added. Quotes and all primary sources are footnoted.

A. Summary

The doctrine of “The Priesthood of Believers” is the biblical understanding that *all* those who have surrendered their lives to Christ as Lord and Savior are united with Him in a personal and intimate manner. The believer today, just as the “priest” of Old Testament times, has direct access to God, can worship God, and proclaim the truth of God to a lost world, and offer their lives in service to God.

The purpose of the “priests” in the Old Testament were to teach the Israelites that atonement for sins required the provision (or death) of an innocent person (without sin) in the victims place through the shedding of blood. The Levitical order (i.e., priests of the OT) could not accomplish that atonement, but it kept alive the expectation of the coming of the *Perfect Priest* and the offering of the *perfect sacrifice* in fulfillment of the gospel promises contained in the OT Scriptures. In Christ, both priesthood (as an office) and sacrifice (as a continual observance) have been brought to fulfillment and to finality.

B. Quote

In his wonderful essay, “The Christian Ministry,” J.B. Lightfoot not only insists that “as individuals, all Christians are priests alike,” he also draws attention to the fact that in the ministerial offices enumerated in 1 Corinthians 12:28ff and Ephesians 4:11ff, that “there is an entire silence about the priestly functions: for the most exalted office in the Church, the highest gift of the Spirit, conveyed no sacerdotal right which was not enjoyed by the humblest member of the Christian community ... above all it has no sacerdotal system. It interposes no sacrificial tribe of class between God and man, by whose intervention alone God is reconciled and man forgiven. Each individual member holds personal communion with the Divine Head ... to Him immediately [the believer] is responsible, and from him directly [the believer] obtains pardon and draws strength.’



All believers in Christ have immediate, personal access to Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit of God that indwells all Christ-followers. No believer has need of any other means—outside *God in them*, be it pastoral, priestly, or ecclesiological (i.e., any church)—to have intimacy with God.

C. Scriptures

Isaiah 61:6, NASB95 - ⁶ *But you will be called the priests of the Lord; You will be spoken of as ministers of our God...*

1 Peter 2:9, NASB95 - ⁹ *But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;*

Revelation 1:5-6, NIV - ⁵ *and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, ⁶ and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.*

Ephesians 2:18, NLT - ¹⁸ *Now all of us can come to the Father through the same Holy Spirit because of what Christ has done for us.*

Ephesians 2:18, NASB95 - ¹⁸ *for through Him we ... have our access in one Spirit to the Father.*

1 Peter 2:4-6, NIV - ⁴ *As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him— ⁵ you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. ⁶ For in Scripture it says: “See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.”*

D. The Priesthood of All Believers—*what does this mean?*¹

The content or application of *priesthood* may be put in the following way:

1. All believers have direct access to God. By faith all Christians approach God directly and personally (Rom 5:2; Eph 2:18) through Christ.

Romans 5:2, NIV - ² *through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.*

Ephesians 2:18, NIV - ¹⁸ *For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.*

2. All believers can offer spiritual sacrifices to God. The whole life of the Christian is to be a service of love—“a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God” (Phil 4:18). All work, activity, prayer, and praise are to be offered to God.

3. All believers can declare the gospel. By word and deed Christians are to reveal the love of God in Christ. They are to “declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Pt 2:9), and they are to make sure that even pagans can recognize their behavior as good (1 Pt 2:12).

4. All believers can join together in worshiping as a local church. “Supplications, prayer, intercessions, and thanksgivings” are to be made for all persons (1 Tm 2:1). The ordinances of baptism and the Lord’s Supper are to be administered on behalf of the whole church as the community serves God and extends his kingdom.

In summary, it may be said that *priesthood* is an activity and function which is best viewed in a *collective sense* as belonging to *the whole body of Christians*, though including of necessity the individual Christian life of service. Its full meaning is negated if it is seen only in individualist terms—my access to God, my right to interpret the Bible, and my ability to discern God’s will, etc.

One must remember that we are all priests, together, in the family of God—The priesthood of all believers!

¹Elwell, Walter A. ; Beitzel, Barry J.: *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*. Grand Rapids, Mich. : Baker Book House, 1988, S. 1754.