

GOD'S HOUSE – A PRIESTHOOD

We will read again the first six verses of Hebrews chapter 3, “Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider Jesus the Apostle and High Priest of our confession. He was faithful to Him who appointed Him, as Moses was in all His house. For He has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, by just so much as the builder of the house has more honor than the house. For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God. Now Moses was faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken later. But Christ was faithful as a Son over His house, whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence in the boast of our hope firm unto the end.”

We have been speaking about God's house and we said the house of God is mentioned in three relationships in the New Testament. We are God's house and we have learned that God's house is first of all a Dwelling Place, John 14:2. And, secondly, His house is a priesthood, First Peter 2:5 (we will read that in a moment). And, thirdly, God's house is a foundation of truth, First Timothy 3:15.

So today, we are going to look at First Peter, chapter two, and verse five, which tells us that God's house (and remember we are God's house) God's house is a holy priesthood, verses 4 & 5, “And coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected by men, but choice and precious in the sight of God, you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”

Now, we have already spoken on the priesthood when we were speaking on the kingdom . . . you remember we went back to the book of Genesis and the two jobs that Adam was given in the beginning, characteristic of what God wanted man to do. He was to cultivate the Garden, that word cultivate was the word “abed” meaning “to serve” or “to tend” or “to till” the ground. And he was “to keep it,” the word “shamar” which is “to keep” or “to guard.”

And the peculiar thing about those two words is that are found once again the book of Numbers, the 18th chapter, and these two terms in Numbers give a description of the job or the task, the purpose of the priesthood in the Old Testament. And we said that the priests were to regard themselves as being on duty, as being on duty on a military post, guarding the sanctity of their charges against all dangers and against unlawful intruders. Israel was to be a kingdom of priests to all nations of the world.

And then we saw how in the New Testament that Christ said that Israel lost their position as priests. They were no longer regarded by God as a kingdom of priests . . . God took that away from them and gave it to another nation bearing fruit. And First Peter, chapter two, tells us that the nation which became His priesthood is the church.

So we have spoken on that aspect the priesthood . . . we will not talk about that today.

Today we want to look at the house of God being a priesthood in a little different way.

A house is not just a dwelling. The word “house” describes the function of a particular people.

In our high school or college history classes, we read of the house of Habsburg, which was the German Royal House, that ruled Austria from 1279 – 1918. We also read of the House of Tudor, the English Royal House, that ruled England from 1485 – 1603.

And then in the Scriptures, we read in the Old Testament of the House of Saul and of the House of David, as examples. These were the ruling Houses or Families in Israel at that time.

So the function of the House of Priests, recorded here in First Peter 2:5, is not to rule, but to offer sacrifices. Now priests do rule in a sense and we have discussed that. But, offering sacrifices is the major job of the priests. It is not the only job, but offering sacrifices is a major part of what the priests did in the Old Testament.

But, in this case, Peter is talking about a spiritual house, and remember the church is that house, and it is being built-up, he says, out of living stones. Individual Christians are being built into a spiritual house, and we noted that also in Paul's writings, that we are living stones being built into a temple he said for the habitation of the Spirit. But Peter said we are being built up for a "holy priesthood." As a house of priests, our job is to offer up spiritual sacrifices which are acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

Now, notice what he says, in this case, he's talking about "spiritual sacrifices." The priests of the Old Testament offered physical sacrifices (bulls, and goats, and calves . . . animals) and it all was a very physical thing. . . but the Old Testament sacrifices it pointed to something spiritual, and he said our task is to offer spiritual sacrifices and these spiritual sacrifices must be acceptable to God through Christ. Now, just because it is spiritual doesn't always mean that it is acceptable.

The occult is spiritual . . . and there is a whole realm out there that we call the spiritual realm . . . and it is as full of evil as it is righteousness. And so Peter tells us these spiritual sacrifices that we offer to God are to be acceptable to God. **There are three things that we are to offer to God as spiritual sacrifices** (I suppose we are all familiar with the first thing I will mention):

Romans 12:1 – here is the first spiritual sacrifice we want to discuss—"I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God (it by God's mercy and the grace he has been talking about in the first 11 chapters of Romans—because of the realities of this grace and mercy of God, he said, I urge you . . .) to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual (that word in your marginal note is "reasonable" or "rational") service of worship." Now notice that . . . you are to present your bodies as living sacrifices . . . they are to be holy . . . and acceptable to God . . . and he says **presenting your bodies in this way is a "reasonable service of worship."**

Present your bodies . . . Paul says we are going to stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ and give answer of the deeds done in this body, whether they are good or bad. He said your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit . . . and throughout the Old Testament, God said He was going to dwell in My People . . . and He dwells in this body and everything we do for the Lord, we do in this body, so he says present your bodies a living sacrifice ---- Not your spirit, not your soul, but your physical body . . . the life that you live (he's not talking about how you think or how you feel or how emotional you are), he's talking about the way you live in this physical body.

You are to live your life in this physical body in such a way as to be a living sacrifice . . . a living offering unto God, acceptable unto God. He told the Corinthians you are not your own, you were bought with a price so glorify God in your body and in your spirit.

Upon being redeemed, you are not to live for yourself. You are to live for God. And whatever you do in this body, do it unto the Glory of God. **That's being a living sacrifice . . . and that is what is acceptable to God.** And he says that is your service of worship, that is your worship service.

We talk about having a Sunday Morning worship service at 11:00 . . . your real worship service is how you live your life out there in the world for the Lord. That's your reasonable service of worship. I have a great concern for what we call worship today and I fear many times that we miss the point because we tend to confine it like the Samaritan woman did to place, where worship occurs at a certain hour at a certain place by our doing certain things (we studied her a few weeks ago) . . . now all of that may be true and that may be worship—I'm not saying that it isn't . . . but I'm saying our real service of worship is presenting our bodies as a sacrifice to God.

Now, the body is the whole person, and I like this passage in the sixth chapter of Romans, verses 1-4 . . . Paul has discussed the fact that we are not continue in sin in order to get more grace because we died to sin. And if you have died to sin, you do not continue in it, and he said your baptism ought to remind you that you died to sin and your old life was buried with Christ, and you were raised to walk in a new life.

And then he says the conclusion to all of this is, down in verse 12, "Therefore, do not let sin reign in your mortal body that you should obey its lusts (and that's the only place it can reign is in your mortal body) – but notice you have control over it "do not let sin reign" – don't let sin dominate you or tell you what to do. **You have control over your life as to whether you let sin dominate it or whether you let righteousness dominate it . . . and it concerns your mortal body.** See . . . that is where the Christian life is lived.

Verse 13 (Romans 6), "and do not go on presenting the members (it's important to remember that word "members") . . . do not go on presenting the members of your body (the members are your hands and your feet, your head, which includes your mind, your thoughts and the intent of your heart . . . all of those are part of your bodily members) do not present the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness"

But he says, "present yourself (present that new life that God has given to you) but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead (and now notice what he adds—not only does he want you to present yourself to God), but your members also as instruments of righteousness to God."

There are a lot of people who try to present themselves to God without bringing their members along. It doesn't work that way. You don't become a Christian and a child of God without living it out in your daily life. **It is not just a consecration service where you dedicate yourself to God . . . it's living that life out there in the world based on what God has done in your life . . . present yourselves and your members to God, as instruments of righteousness.**

To understand that sacrifice, I want us to go back to Leviticus. There is an interesting contrast in the sacrifices of the Old Testament and the sacrifice we are to make. And I think presenting our bodies as a sacrifice (which I think means the whole person) is comparable to what is called “the whole burnt offering” in the Old Testament. It was called the “whole burnt offering” because the whole animal was sacrificed. Now in some of the Old Testament sacrifices, the priests would take part of it and that would be the priests’ daily portion and just part of the animal was sacrificed. But the “whole burnt offering” the whole animal was sacrificed, not just part of it.

And so we have instructions . . . the first chapter of Leviticus . . . the first instruction that God gives concerning offerings or sacrifices is the burnt offering, later called the “whole burnt offering.”

Leviticus, chapter 1, beginning in verse 3, “If his offering is a burnt offering from the herd, he shall offer it, a male without defect; he shall offer it at the doorway of the tent of meeting (you see . . . at the doorway . . . he is not to come into the tent of meeting to worship, he is not come into the presence of God until this offering is made . . . it is to be made at the very entrance of his worship . . . at the doorway of the tent of meeting) that he may be accepted before the Lord.” The whole idea of the burnt offering was that he might be accepted before the Lord.

Vs. 4-5, “And he shall lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, that it may be accepted for him to make atonement on his behalf. And he shall slay the young bull before the Lord (the priests are not going to do it for him . . . he must do it) and the priests, Aaron’s sons, shall offer up the blood and sprinkle the blood around on the alter that is at the doorway of the tent of meeting.”

Vs. 6-9, “He shall then skin the burnt offering and cut it into its pieces (he’ll not just cut it into pieces, he’ll cut it into its pieces . . . it is a very precise thing) And the sons of Aaron the priest shall put fire on the alter and arrange wood on the fire. Then Aaron’s sons, the priests, shall arrange the pieces, the head, and the suet over the wood which is on the fire that is on the alter. Its entrails, however, and its legs he shall wash with water. And the priests shall offer up in smoke all of it on the alter for a burnt offering, an offering by fire and a soothing aroma to the Lord.

Three times in this chapter he says it will be offered up as smoke on the alter for a burnt offering, an offering of fire on the alter that is a soothing aroma to the Lord. So it sounds like this is really an ascension offering. The whole offering, the whole offering is ascending in smoke before the Lord. And it represents the person offering it coming into the very presence of God.

Leviticus is not simply a historical document showing how the ancient Israelites worshiped God. Leviticus is a revelation of God’s character and His plan of redemption and it is being lived out in the sacrifices of these people.

So I want you to notice verse 6 and I want to give you a biblical theology of skin. Now I know you would rather hear about the glories on the other shore, and here we are about to talk about

skin. But, believe it or not, there is a theology of skin in the Old Testament, vs. 6, “He shall then skin the burnt offering and cut it into its pieces.” In the Old Testament, leprosy could infect both skin and clothing (Lev 13:22 and 47-51). Now remember that. The priest’s clothing could have leprosy, and he would be unclean because of his clothing. His skin and his clothing had to be right. If the priest had a blemish on his skin, he was unclean. So both his clothing and his skin could prevent him from offering sacrifice to God. The priests had to wear undefiled garments. Exodus 28 has an entire chapter on the garments of the priests . . . the priest’s garments must be undefiled. And in the same manner, he was disqualified for service if his skin was unclean (Lev 21:20). So, emphasis is placed upon the clothes that the priest wore and emphasis is put upon his skin, and other defects are mentioned.

Now, this doesn’t sound like a very spiritual thing . . . it certainly isn’t preached very much, but there is something here I want you to see. Adam and Eve, whenever they sinned in the Garden, God clothed them with skins . . . to hide their nakedness because their nakedness was the emblem of their shame that they were experiencing. And shame is the result of knowing we have sinned and standing in the presence of God knowing that we have sinned. **Shame has to be covered.**

So, notice Lev 1:6, “He shall then skin the burnt offering . . .” When he goes to offer this burnt offering, he is to skin it, take its skin off, it is to be completely uncovered, it is not even to be covered with skin. Animals don’t wear clothes . . . its skin is its clothes, so the animal had to be skinned. And then it was cut into its pieces . . . not just hacked-up just any way, but cut in a certain way, and laid on the alter and burnt, and the smoke ascended to God.

That was the burnt offering, the sacrifice representing the one offered when coming into the presence of God. Now, what does all of that have to do with me and you? What does that have to do with presenting our bodies as living sacrifices to God?

Let’s turn to the fourth chapter of the book of Hebrews . . . he’s talking about Christ being our High Priest and our entrance into the very presence of God. He says in vs. 11-12, “Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall through following the same example of disobedience. For the word of God is living . . . and active . . . and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of the soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to discern the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”

Cut it in its pieces . . . be specific . . . the word of God must cut us before we ascend into God’s presence. We have got to be cut by the word . . . there must be a division of soul and spirit, joints and marrow, there must be a discernment of the thoughts and the intents of the heart . . . if the word of God has not cut into your heart and cut into your life and changed you . . . you are not going to be accepted when you ascend into the presence of God . . . when you bring your body, when you bring your body as a living sacrifice, it has to be first be cut by the word of God. You have to cut out those things which are unclean and you must have your life cut into pieces by the word of God.

You must be quickened in your heart by God’s word, and not only that, notice vs. 13, “And there is not creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him

with whom we have to do.” All things are open and naked . . . all things are open and skinned before Him. **We cannot cover our shame and be acceptable in the sight of God.** We have to be naked . . . the sacrifice has to be skinned.

I admit I never understood that portion of vs 13 where it says all things must be open and naked or made bare before His eyes until I connected it with that burnt offering in Leviticus. The animal had to be skinned . . . there was nothing that could be covered.

And when you present your body to God as a living sacrifice, you not only have to be cut, you have to be skinned . . . you cannot cover up anything that is sinful in the sight of God and Him still accept you. Your life has got to be open.

So, we present our members as living sacrifices.

Alright . . . while we are in Hebrews, let's go to our second point . . . the second thing that we are to offer to God is in verse 15, of Hebrews chapter 13 . . . as priests, we are to make this sacrifice . . . “Through Him then, let us continually offer up (now this is the continual offering, this is something we do continually, not just on Sunday Morning) let us offer up continually a sacrifice of praise to God (so the second thing we should offer up to God is our praise, and praising God is not simply raising our hands and enjoying an emotional experience in some kind of a meeting . . . he says this praise that we are to offer to God is--the fruit of our lips that give thanks to His name.”

Let me read you a parallel passage from the Old Testament . . . Hosea 14:1-2, in vs. 1, he tells Israel to return to the Lord your God for you have stumbled because of your iniquity (and here is the way they are to return to the Lord), vs. 2, he said, “Take words with you . . . and return to the Lord. Say to Him (talk to Him) Say to the Lord, ‘Take away all iniquity, And receive us graciously, That we may present to you the fruit of our lips.’” God wants not only our lives, He wants the fruit of our lips . . . He wants our speech.

When we offer unto God our songs of praise and thanksgiving, we are offering unto God a sacrifice which He demands of us as priests, and when we sing unto the Lord and teach and admonish one another with songs, hymns, and spiritual songs, we are not just having a good time and not just enjoying ourselves, and are not being just emotionally or spiritually fed, we are offering a sacrifice to God . . . the fruit of our lips . . . He said let it be acceptable to Him.

The songs we sing . . . let me say this, we need to be very careful what we offer to God when we sing. The only thing I'll recommend is that our singing be in accordance with God's Word because God is not going to accept a lie that I sing. We are not just singing so people can hear us . . . we are offering the fruit of our lips. Not only that, there is a passage in Colossians 4 that I think we should probably read, and I'll admit I did not understand this passage until I read something in Leviticus . . . we'll read from Colossians and then from Leviticus, chapter two.

Here we're talking about a sacrifice . . . the sacrifice of praise or the fruit of our lips. Colossians 4:6, “Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned, as it were, with salt, so that you may know how you should respond to each person.” This doesn't say that we are offering our speech to

God as a sacrifice, but it says our speech that we use toward one another and toward the world, not just what we sing, but what we say should be seasoned, as it were, with salt.

Now you go back to Leviticus 2:13, “Every grain offering of yours, moreover, you shall season with salt, so that the salt of the covenant of your God shall not be lacking from your grain offering; with all of your offerings you shall offer salt.”

So you see, seasoned with salt . . . that has to do with sacrifice and with covenant. And so he talks about the covenant of salt that was to be offered to God. And that’s what I think Paul has that in mind in Colossians 4 when he says let your speech be seasoned with salt . . . **speak as if your were speaking covenant . . . season it with salt and speak as if it were a sacrifice . . . and though you are speaking to one another, it is still the fruit of your lips . . . and a man will be judged by what he says . . .** Matt 12:36-37, Jesus tells us, “**And I say to you, that every careless word that men shall speak, they shall render account for it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.**” **Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks . . . Let your speech be seasoned with salt . . . beware of what you say!**

Guard your speech . . . even though it is to one another and even though it is to the world, it is an offering to God. It’s the fruit of your lips . . . it is a sacrifice . . . and you are in covenant with God. Salt it! So that it might be acceptable to God.

The last offering that we are to make, and we are pretty familiar with this kind of offering . . . I think we look at it wrongly sometimes, but the next offering, in Hebrews 13, verse 16, “An do not neglect doing good and sharing; for with such sacrifices God is pleased.” Our giving, our sharing to help the needy is, he says, a sacrifice.

Along that line, let’s look at another passage in Phillipians, chapter four, the last part of that chapter, let’s begin in vs. 15, “And you yourselves also know, Philippians, that at the first preaching of the gospel, after I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone (he compliments them for their giving to his ministry for the purpose of spreading the gospel)”

Vs.16-18, “for even in Thessalonica you sent a *gift* more than once for my needs. Not that I seek the *gift* itself, but I seek the profit which increases to your account. But I have received everything in full, and have an abundance; I am amply supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you have sent (now notice what he says about their offering) . . . it is a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice . . . well-pleasing to God.”

Our giving is our sacrifice to God. And there are two reasons we are to give in the New Testament . . . and this surprises a lot of people . . . we are not told to give just to be giving . One is to help the needy. We are commanded to give in order that the needs of the needy can be met. Of course, we let Govt take that over and we don’t feel that responsibility very much any more. But that’s one purpose for our giving and that is to help the poor and the needy (See Gal 2:10; James 1:27, II Cor 9:7-12).

The other one is for the preaching of the gospel. [There are many New Testament scriptural references for this, but in the New Testament, all references for giving are for only these two reasons, including “doing good.”] In this case, it is described as for the proclamation of the gospel, for the support of those who preach the gospel, and for all that may be involved in preaching the gospel (and we can include the church building and things like that it’s for the furtherance of the gospel).

Those are the only two reasons we give in the New Testament . . . We are to give in order that the gospel may be proclaimed and in order that the needs of the poor may be met. We are to give according to our hearts, to give willingly, cheerfully, and liberally, without show, sometimes secretly. And our giving is a sacrifice to God.

So Peter says you are God’s house and according to Peter being a part of God’s House is for the purpose of being a Holy Priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices . . . you are a House of Priests, a House of Holy Priests, offering spiritual sacrifices.

The business of the occupation of priests in the Old Testament was to be a priest. They didn’t have any inheritance in the land, they didn’t farm the land, they didn’t raise cattle, they didn’t work in any industry (they weren’t carpenters), they weren’t tradesmen . . . the only thing that priests did was to do the work of the priest. He was supported by the rest of the nation. That’s how it was with the Old Testament priests.

As priests in the New Testament, there are three spiritual sacrifices we are to offer to God in such a way as to be acceptable to God: we are to offer our bodies as living sacrifices to God, we are to offer the fruit of our lips in praise to His name, and we are to offer of our possessions as a sacrifice.

That’s why He has priests . . . that’s why He is building His house with priests . . . that’s who we are . . . Let’s not forget our mission . . . That’s one of the reasons why we exist--To be a House of Priests . . . and You are God’s House . . . You are a dwelling place of God . . . You have a river that flows from you and everything that river touches is made clean . . . And thirdly, as the House of God, you are the foundation for Truth and a witness of the Truth—described as a Pillar, which in this context means a Witness of the Truth.

As a the Body of Christ, which is the Church, we have an enormous responsibility to God and to Jesus, to each other, and to the World . . . Let’s rejoice in all that He has done for us, in how He has equipped us, and for things He has for us to do as His House, each of being built up as a living stone.