

New Covenant Priesthood (Part 1)

Living Sacrifices

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Given 08-Sep-01; Sermon #519

The previous series began with the intent of teaching about the sacrifices of Leviticus. But very shortly after I started, I began to be impressed with how detailed the instructions given to the priests are. Not only how detailed, but also how insistent God is that they are to be carried out exactly as He says.

What is impressive about this is that this is not in regard to the Ten Commandments—where we all know that "the wages of sin is death." We are talking here about ceremonial things. But I think there is within all of us a tendency to discount as being unimportant the ceremonial responsibilities that were given in such detail.

So insistent is God that He not only threatened the death penalty on a number of occasions, but He actually also carried it out! The most notable of these were the ones in Leviticus 10 (when He killed Nadab and Abihu) and then in Numbers 16-18 (where almost 15,000 people lost their lives as a testimony of the seriousness of following sacrificial and offering instructions right to the letter).

It was then that I made the direct connection to the Wavesheaf offering and its symbolic and practical ramifications. Having become so deeply involved in this, I am absolutely certain that we are correct regarding the dating of Pentecost during these odd years when Passover falls on a weekly Sabbath.

I'm going to go back to one of the original intentions of that series, and that is **the priestly responsibilities**. I want you to turn with me to a couple of scriptures that we are growing familiar with regarding this.

I Peter 2:5 You also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.

I Peter 2:9 But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that you should show forth the praises of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.

In verse 5, the church is called a spiritual house. In verse 9—a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and God's own people. Each of those terms indicates a

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group, a society, or a community—unique as to what they are to do, and what they are in God's name. The implication is that there is nothing like them on earth. The church is unique. The church is chosen, royal, holy and "God's own" in a way that no other people are.

The term **house** can be understood either as indicating a building that people inhabit (or, in this particular case, that God dwells in) or in other places the sense of a dynasty (as in "house of York" or "house of Windsor").

I thought in this grouping that one of the more interesting terms is that some modern Bibles translate that word *generation* as either "*kindred*" or even "*race*." These terms have interesting differences, because a **generation** indicates people all born within the same period of time—as in "the Boomer Generation," or in "Generation X." **Kindred** has a slightly different implication because it indicates a people or group related by something held in common—such as blood, character, or spirit. We even say, "*They're kindred spirits.*"

Race, though, indicates a whole, major division of mankind—similar to red, yellow, black, or white. Seen in that light, the church represents something entirely unique, new, different from all other races of mankind. In other words, if that is the proper translation, then **a new race** of people is being formed. What distinguishes this new race from other races is not something external (like the color of one's skin) but the way that they live and what they do. This [new] race **shows forth the praises of God**.

I think that any of those translations is essentially correct—depending upon what the translators feel should be emphasized. And I don't think any of them will really mislead anybody regardless of what the term is. I want you to go back with me, now, to Isaiah 43. The language here is highly figurative. But it's not very hard once we get to one particular phrase, where Peter got at least one of the concepts and the authority for what he wrote.

Isaiah 43:15 I am the LOORD your Holy One, the creator of Israel, your King.

He's obviously speaking to Israel; but, as we are going to see, in spirit He is also speaking to the church. The primary objective here is not the church. The primary objective is Israel, and it is a time yet future. This has not yet been fulfilled, but it is a time yet future.

Isaiah 43:16-17 Thus saith the LOORD, which makes a way in the sea, and a

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path in the mighty waters; which brings forth the chariot and horse...

Now, he's obviously referring *backwards* to the coming out of Egypt. But what happened before is something that is going to happen, in a similar way, *in the future*—when the children of Israel come out of their captivity during the tribulation and the Day of the Lord, and they have to be regathered.

Isaiah 43:17-18 ...which brings forth the chariot and the horse, the army and the power; they shall lie down together, they shall not rise: they are extinct, they are quenched as a wick. Remember you not the former things...

He said, "*I want you to forget about coming out of Egypt. Something far grander is going to occur.*"

Isaiah 43:18-21 ...neither consider the things of old. Behold, I will do a new thing; now it shall spring forth; shall you not know it? I will even make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert. The beast of the field shall honor Me, the dragons and the owls: because I give waters in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert, to give drink to My people, My chosen. [We are beginning to get into I Peter 2:9 here.] This people have I formed for Myself; they shall show forth My praises.

Now we are beginning to bring **the church** into this. And I can say that confidently, because Peter did. What's the job of the New Testament church? It's ***to show forth the praises of God.***

Isaiah 43:22-23 But you have not called upon Me, O Jacob; but you have been weary of Me, O Israel. You have not brought Me the small cattle of your burnt offerings; neither have you honored Me with your sacrifices. I have not caused you to serve with an offering, nor wearied you with incense.

Again, think of I Peter 2:5 and 9 and *the responsibility of the church*: (1) to bring sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ and (2) to show forth the praises of God.

Isaiah 43:24 You have brought Me no sweet cane with money, neither have you filled Me with the fat of your sacrifices: but you have made Me to serve

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with your sins, you have wearied Me with your iniquities.

Peter sees the church as part of the fulfillment of this prophecy—focusing on a people who will truly serve and glorify God, in contrast to disobedient Israel. The church is a forerunner of what is to come. This also confirms, in a very general way, that we have been formed for the purpose of showing forth His praises. This is what a priest does! This is why Peter wrote that we are to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.

This priesthood is not yet fully formed, but rather, it is **a priesthood** that is being formed. As such, we nonetheless are expected to perform certain functions in preparation for our formal installation that will not occur until Christ returns and the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth under Christ—when that priesthood will appear suddenly, fully formed.

Now, God has spent 6,000 years forming it. We are called to be kings **and priests**. And even now Peter makes very sure that we understand that we are **already** a priesthood. We are a priesthood **in training**. But—I don't want to forget this "but"—even though we are in training, we have *priesthood responsibilities*—because he said in verse 5 that we **are** to offer up spiritual sacrifices.

We're going to go back to a scripture that I know you are familiar with. It's one that people argue a lot about. It appears in Colossians 2. Paul writes:

Colossians 2:16-17 Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holy day, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days; which are a shadow of things to come; but the body *is* of Christ.

There is an alternate translation that may help us to understand what Paul is getting at here. I'm going to paraphrase this, so this is not coming directly from this other translation: "*These are a shadow of future things, but the substance or reality [meaning that which is real; that which is firm] belongs to Christ.*"

He is saying that Old Testament activities **point** to *spiritual realities* under the New Covenant. He is not saying that Old Covenant activities no longer have to be observed, but rather they need to be raised—to be **elevated**—to be understood and applied in their God-intended spiritual sense.

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It's interesting that Protestant scholars understand this fact, and they will even remark on it in their commentaries. I'm going to quote to you from "The Life and Epistles of St. Paul," from page 346. This is a commentary. The authors are two Englishmen. Their names are Conybeare and Howson. They write:

The festivals observed by the apostolic church were at the first the same with those of the Jews; and the observation of these was continued, especially by the Christians of Jewish birth, for a considerable time.

Quoting from the same commentary, by Conybeare and Howson, page 574—they state: "Nay, more. He himself [meaning, Paul] observed the Jewish festivals." That makes it very clear that Colossians 2:16-17 is not telling us that those festivals—those so called "Old Testament laws"—are done away. Rather, he is saying that they are to be **raised**. Just like Conybeare and Howson said—they are to be raised. They are to be elevated. They are to be understood in a spiritual sense, rather than something that is merely material and physical.

So it doesn't take a rocket scientist to understand Conybeare and Howson's conclusion, which is that contrary to the common misunderstanding of these verses (which, of course, most of Protestantism and Catholicism hold), the Bible and history show that the apostolic church kept God's holy days. And the congregations dominated by Gentiles were the first to break away from them, and begin to keep festivals like Christmas and Easter.

Now, let's ask a question. Did keeping pagan festivals show forth the praises of God? Well, the apostles clearly did not think so—or they would have kept them. It begins to become very clear that Old Testament activities contained very valuable instructions for the new covenant church.

Hebrews 9:1 Then verily the first covenant had also ordinances of divine service, and a worldly sanctuary.

The subject here is just what we're talking about—Old Covenant ceremonies.

Hebrews 9:2-11 For there was a tabernacle made; the first, wherein was the candlestick, and the table, and the shewbread; which is called the sanctuary. And after the second veil, the tabernacle which is called the Holiest of all; [So he's talking there about the holy place and the Holies of holies.] which

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had the golden censer, and the ark of the covenant overlaid round about with gold, wherein was the golden pot that had manna, and Aaron's rod that budded, and the tables of the covenant; and over it the cherubims of glory shadowing the mercy seat; of which we cannot now speak particularly. Now when these things [that is, these ceremonial things] were thus ordained, the priests went always into the first tabernacle [the holy place], accomplishing the service of God. But into the second [the Holies of holies] went the high priest alone once every year, not without blood, which he offered for himself, and for the errors of the people. The Holy Spirit this signifying, that the way into the Holiest of all was not yet made manifest, while as the first tabernacle was yet standing: which was a figure [a type; a symbol] for the time then present, in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices, that could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience; which stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation. But Christ being come an High Priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building.

Paul is saying here essentially the same things that he did in Colossians 2:16-17 **except** that he is more specific regarding some priestly activities that impact on understanding this sermon's subject. Old Covenant worship services signified something *spiritual* beyond the activity itself.

In the illustration that Paul is using here in Hebrews 9, they signify that the way to God was not fully opened to those worshipping. Just as surely as only the priests were permitted into the holy place and only the high priests were permitted into the Holies of holies once a year, so men were in reality blocked from God. There was no access to Him.

In like manner today, our High Priest—Jesus Christ—is the only one who is literally, physically, and continuously in God's presence. The church (the forming priesthood), like the Old Covenant priests, can draw near to God and serve God; but the rest of the world is denied access, just like the rest of Israel was under the old covenant.

I hope that you get what Paul is impressing upon us here. That is ***the superior privilege*** that has been given to the church, in being able **to draw near to God**. Old Covenant worship services—including the people the priests served, the places that they served, the articles and the clothing that they used while serving, and the ceremonies they performed—were all typical of what **WE** are required to do, or to be, in our service to

God on a spiritual plane. In other words, it is all spelled out in the Old Testament on a physical plane. And we, by means of the Spirit of God, are to raise it (elevate it) into our lives on a spiritual plane.

For example, though we are no longer required to literally make a burnt, meal, peace, trespass, sin offering, or firstfruits, or drink offering at a temple (morning and evening, or on a holy day, or on a Sabbath), what they symbolize is very much **required—every day!** Not just when it's your turn to serve in the "course" that you happen to be in. But the New Testament priesthood is required to do what the priests did when their turn came, every day! (Morning and evening, and throughout the day.) We will see more of this as we go along.

I think that the first question to ask is not "*What were the offerings?*" but, rather, "*Who was required to give them?*" If one isn't required, why waste time looking into them (except, maybe, to satisfy curiosity)? Is God being arbitrary in His requirements? Is there purpose for them to be part of the Bible?

In one sense, every adult in Israel was required to give offerings to Him, but only the priests were required to actually, literally, present them at the temple and on the brazen altar—in the presence of God—on suitable occasions. Only the priests actually did the work. Because God designates the church as **a priesthood** under the new covenant, it is essential to our understanding of this position and its responsibilities before God to study into these things in their Old Covenant setting—because they are shown in very great detail there. Then, what we learn must be transferred, or applied spiritually, to the New Covenant because—except for the physical differences—there is virtually no difference as to *place* or *position* before God, between us and the Old Covenant priests.

Now, let's go back to Exodus 4. This was when Moses was leaving Midian. God confronted him there. And so He's giving him some instruction on the way.

Exodus 4:21-23 And the LORD said unto Moses, "When you go to return into Egypt, see that you do all those wonders before Pharaoh, which I have put in your hand: but [He warns him] I will harden his heart, that he shall not let the people go. And you shall say unto Pharaoh, 'Thus saith the LORD, "Israel is My son, even My firstborn: And I say unto you, Let my son go, that he may serve Me: and if you refuse to let him go, behold, I will slay your son, even your firstborn.'""

The Bible uses a large variety of metaphors, imagery, similes, types, parables,

allegories, and analogies as teaching tools. They are used either to hide or cloud a meaning, or sometimes to make them clear—so that there is understanding with God's people either way. Here, in Exodus 4:21, Israel is seen as a cohesive body—as a single human son. In other places, Israel is portrayed as a virginal woman, married to God—and, in other places, as a harlot, who is still legally married but in reality having departed from the marriage in terms of the performance of her duties.

In like manner, the church is typified as a body (of which Christ is the Head) and the firstborn of God. In another analogy, the church is portrayed as the firstfruits—not a body, but an assembly of individuals harvested as a crop. In another place, it is pictured as a loaf of bread, and it has leaven in it.

Now, though there are specific differences between the analogies, they nonetheless work together in a general way toward the same goal. They are simply different teaching tools. But—a warning here—we should not expect that every analogy will harmonize 100% with every other analogy in every regard. Expecting them to do so has given people no end of trouble on this Pentecost counting issue. This is because they try to force the symbolism of Passover, Unleavened Bread, and Pentecost into perfect alignment. It won't work. (They never will.)

Why? The Wavesheaf offering is a harvest ritual. Pentecost is a harvest celebration. Those two harmonize. They go together. But neither Passover nor Unleavened Bread typifies a harvest. Though Passover and its symbolism, Unleavened Bread and its symbolism, and Pentecost and its symbolism are generally related—each is also a separate step. And therefore the analogies are going to differ in some degrees.

So the Wavesheaf symbolism belongs to Pentecost. It doesn't matter whether it falls inside Unleavened Bread each and every year. In fact, the calendar will not permit it. It's good to remember this principle, and not attempt to force every activity of the priests into a mold in which they do not fit. That which I've just given you is a very important principle to rightly dividing the word of truth.

Exodus 19:4-6 You have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto Myself. Now therefore, if you will obey My voice indeed, and keep My covenant, then you shall be a peculiar treasure unto Me above all people: for all the earth is Mine: and you shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which you shall speak unto the children of Israel.

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This is very clearly another place from which Peter drew on what he stated there in I Peter 2:5, 9. In fact, it is almost an exact parallel. *Israel* and *the church* were **both** separated from the world and made holy by God. **Both** became **God's personal property**. That's what the term "peculiar treasure" means. And, because of what God did—through separating Israel and the church from the world—**both** became **obligated** to meet priesthood requirements.

I want you to notice something here. Israel's position was *conditioned by obedience*. Look down in verse 5. It says, "Now therefore, IF..." What happened was that Israel **immediately**, within a couple of days, rejected the offer. They rejected their privilege. Look down in verse 10.

Exodus 19:10 And the LORD said unto Moses, "Go unto the people, and sanctify them..."

Here, the word "**sanctify**" does not mean set apart. It means consecrate. It means dedicate them, make them pure. The word **holy** has two meanings. It means to set aside, or to set apart, or to cut out. But that thought always, always, always carries with it a sense of **purity**. Now notice what Moses was told then to do (just to show you that "sanctify" here means, "purify").

Exodus 19:10 ...and let them wash their clothes.

You know what clothes symbolize in the New Testament. It symbolizes the righteous acts of the saints. But here they physically had to wash their clothes. They had to purify them. What were they going to do? They were going to draw near to God. And in order to *draw near to God*, they had to *be encompassed by righteous acts*.

Exodus 19:17-18 And Moses brought forth the people out of the camp to meet with God; and they stood at the nether part of the mount. And mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because the LORD descended upon it in fire: and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly.

That must have been terrifying! I know that I've gone through a few earthquakes. And when that ground begins to shake, immediately my chest gets a feeling in it that's not pleasant. "*Aught, oh. How strong is this one going to be? How long is it going to last? Is*

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the building I'm in going to begin to cave down?" We sing that song, "When Israel Out of Egypt Went" and it says, "the hills skipped to and fro." I don't know what this was on the Richter scale, but it must have been terrifying. They were bouncing up and down.

Exodus 19:20-22 And the LOORD came down upon mount Sinai, on the top of the mount: and the LOORD called Moses up to the top of the mount; and Moses went up. And the LOORD said unto Moses, "Go down, charge the people, lest they break through [In their terror, they would have run in the wrong direction.] unto the LOORD to gaze, and many of them perish. And let the priests also, which come near to the LOORD, sanctify themselves...

Here it [sanctify] doesn't mean consecrate. It doesn't mean pure. Remember that they were already washed up by this time. Here it means, "set themselves apart." Separate them. Get them away.

Exodus 19:22-25 ...lest the LOORD break forth upon them." And Moses said unto the LOORD, "The people cannot come up to mount Sinai: for You charged us, saying, 'Set bounds about the mount, and sanctify it.'" And the LOORD said unto him, "Away, get you down, and you shall come up, you, and Aaron with you: but let not the priests and the people break through to come up unto the LOORD, lest He break forth upon them." So Moses went down unto the people, and spake unto them.

You can also write down, in your notes, Deuteronomy 5:4-5 that pertains to this. I want you to understand as I preface what I am going to say here that I am not holding them in contempt, because their rejection was at least partly based on their own **accurate** recognition of their sinfulness. Despite the fact that they were cleaned up, their recognition of their sinfulness when confronted with God's holiness (which was demonstrated by the mountains jumping around and fire shooting everywhere, and the trumpet and the thunder) was why God accepted their proposal immediately. "*Stop them,*" He said. Therefore, their refusal to draw near to God was based on **a correct assessment of their unacceptability to do the job of a priest**—despite the fact that they had cleansed themselves and their clothing, externally.

Now, we are going to look at a New Testament parallel, in Hebrews—which is the Leviticus of the New Testament.

Hebrews 12:18-26 For you [Christians] are not come unto the mount that

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might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which voice they that heard entreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more. (For they could not endure that which was commanded, 'And if so much as a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned, or thrust through with a dart.' And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, "I exceedingly fear and quake.") But you [Christians] are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaks better things than that of Abel. See that you refuse not [as Israel did] Him that speaks. For if they escaped not who refused Him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from Him that speaks from heaven: whose voice then shook the earth: but now He has promised, saying, "Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven."

We have no excuse for refusing the obligations that God's calling puts us under. God clearly accepted Israel's refusal at Mt. Sinai, but He cannot accept ours, because we have been **cleansed internally** in order that we are acceptable. We can't say to Him that we are not acceptable—because He has cleansed us. He has cleansed us! Not we ourselves, He did it. And He put us into a position where we cannot refuse (if you understand what I mean). Sure, we can be hardheaded and stiff-necked, and we can say "No." But I'll tell you, anybody in his right mind will not refuse the privilege that God has given us.

Now let's look at this in a little more detail, and go back to Acts 10. This is the time that Peter had the sheet dropped down before his eyes in a vision.

Acts 10:15 And the voice spoke unto him again the second time, "What God has cleansed, that call not you common."

Acts 10:28 And he said unto them, "You know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God has showed me that I should not call any man common or unclean."

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The world jumps on that verse, and it says that any human being is acceptable and ready for salvation. Now, is that really what it says? No, it does not say that. If you would just take that verse isolated as it is, then you would have to say, "Yes, *they are correct.*" But it is **not** to be isolated like that.

I John 1:7-9 But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Feed that back into Acts 10:15 and 28. We can understand that God didn't **cleanse** all of mankind. He cleanses only those that He has called—whether Israelite or Gentile—who have repented and come under the blood of Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 1:7 In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.

That makes it very clear that what makes us "cleansed" is the vicarious death of Jesus Christ—taking the penalty that we would otherwise have to suffer, and thus providing the legal basis permitting God to forgive us and to cleanse us. There's one final scripture here, where all these things are brought together.

Colossians 1:20-22 And having made peace through the blood of His cross, by Him to reconcile all things unto Himself; by Him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven. And you, that were sometimes alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now has He reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreprieveable in His sight.

Thus, by that process (this series of events), we are cleansed. We are made acceptable before God to be in His presence on the basis of God's calling, faith, repentance, and Christ's blood. Israel refused to draw near to God. And a priest cannot perform his functions **unless** he draws near to God—because that is where many (in fact, virtually all) of his functions are performed.

Numbers 16:5 And he [Moses] spoke unto Korah and unto all his company,

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saying, "Even tomorrow the LORD will show who are His, and who is holy; and will cause him to come near unto Him: even him whom He has chosen will He cause to come near unto Him."

That is very significant! God **causes us** to "come near." We don't go on our own. If He didn't do what He does, we would never draw near to God—ever! It is His work that enables us to come into His presence. That's what comparing Ezekiel 19 with this New Testament shows you and me. So, I hope that I have proved to you that we have **no excuse** for not taking advantage of the privilege—the awesome privilege—to be **a priest of God**.

So, *coming near to God* is a priest's calling. A priest's work is essentially mediatorial. He stands much like a bridge. The Roman Catholic Church's high priest is the *pontifex maximus*. What that means is the highest, greatest, bridge. It literally means that. And he stands between God and the people. (That is not a wrong concept, except that he has put himself in place of Jesus Christ.) But that is a priest's job—to stand between God and the people. We are beginning to get close to what **your job** is. You are **to stand between God and the world**. We shall see this develop. We have an awesome responsibility!

The English term "*priest*" actually comes from a root meaning *first*—as in firstborn. The same root appears in the prefix "presby"—as in Presbyterian. That Protestant group saw themselves as God's firstborn, or God's firstfruit. A priest is one who comes first, or he goes first. He goes, and then others follow. Isn't it becoming clear? Our High Priest—He is the first one in the presence of God eternally, never to leave.

Now, we can **draw close**; but with our kind of character (as variable as it is) we come and go. We are like a Ping-Pong ball going back and forth across a table. But we still have *the responsibility* and *the privilege* of drawing close to God. And it is something that He shows from the Old Testament ceremonies that we are supposed to do every morning and every evening, as pictured by the incense offering—once in the morning, once in the evening, at least. David said, "*Morning, noon, and evening*" he went before God.

"Priest"—or "first" (its root)—indicates a leadership position. Christ is our High Priest. He led us into the presence of God. We follow Him into the presence of God; and we are, symbolically, very close to Him there. But we are **leading others**, who are going to **follow us** into the presence of God. And even as Christ's work made it possible for us to get into the presence of God, so—in the future—Christ's work *and* our work are going to

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lead the rest of mankind into the presence of God, so that they too will have the same privilege that we do. So the whole church goes **first before God** in behalf of the people who will follow at a later time.

When the priests in Israel drew near to God, they took with them the thanksgiving, and the entreaties, and the sacrifices of themselves and of the people. But doing this is a two-way street—or bridge. They also brought back with them the **gifts**—namely things like reconciliation, understanding of God's will, and all kinds of other blessing of God.

The Aaronic priesthood had to operate with a very serious and visible shortcoming. That "shortcoming" is what much of the book of Hebrews concerns itself with, by means of comparing Jesus Christ (our High Priest) with Aaron—and, of course, with it the whole Aaronic priesthood.

Hebrews 7:24-28 But this Man [meaning Christ], because He continues ever [He is eternal now], has an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever lives to make intercession for them. For such an High Priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens; who needs not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for His own sins, and then for the people's: for this He did once, when He offered up Himself. For the law makes men high priests which have an infirmity [a weakness]; but the word of the oath, which was since the law, makes the Son, who is consecrated for evermore.

The "shortcoming" that I am alluding to is that the Aaronic priesthood—including the high priest—was just as sinful as the population that they were supposed to be serving. In order for this to be corrected, it was necessary that the true High Priest be one of divine nature, perfect, and sinless. Jesus Christ was both deity and humanity, and He qualified—through His sinlessness, His offering of His life, and His compassion—to be High Priest for the entirety of humanity. If you want to read the whole book of Hebrews to extract those things, you will see that I am correct. Those are the three things that are pointed out. (1) That He was divine, (2) the offering of His perfect life, and (3) His mercy qualified Him to be High Priest.

Now, Aaron's sons attained to the priesthood simply by being born into Aaron's line. But the church becomes priests by means of **regeneration**, making us part of the Divine Family—and thus brothers of Jesus Christ. Do you see the parallel? It even carries through there, as well.

II Peter 1:4 Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these you might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

We are called of God. We are separated from the rest of mankind. We are redeemed through the blood of Jesus Christ, and cleansed from sin's corruption. And then we are made partakers of the divine nature—all in order **to make us acceptable for the performance of our duties as priests**. We have no excuse for drawing back. We have a perfect and eternal High Priest. We are cleansed, and we are in the same Divine Family that He is. Are you going to tell me that you don't want to *draw close* to your "Dad"—that's what it amounts to—and do what He says?

So now the priesthood no longer stands before God on behalf of just Israel. Now the priesthood draws near to God in behalf of the entirety of humanity. And the purpose of the priesthood is essentially the same as under the Old Covenant, but its labor has been **elevated to a spiritual level**. We no longer have to burn bulls, and goats, and sheep, and turtledoves on a burning fire at the door of the temple. **We are the temple!** And, in a secondary way, we—like Jesus Christ who went before us—are **also the sacrifice** that is put on the altar.

I Peter 2:5 [We are...] to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.

I Peter 2:9 [And we are to...] show forth the praises of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvellous light.

These are two blending categories of **our responsibility as a priest**. The one is largely hidden from public view. The other is intended to be very open to public scrutiny. The first involves things that we generally do privately. The second involves the witness of our lives—mostly before those who know us, but it is not limited to that (because the second one involves the preaching of the gospel to the world).

Romans 12:1-2 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be you transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

The principle that Paul exhorts us to consider here applies to both areas of priestly conduct. In the Greek, the emphasis (in verse 1) is on the word "therefore." That might surprise you. The Greeks had an emphatic style of writing. They wrote like Herbert Armstrong did—ALL CAPS, some words *italicized*, and a lot of exclamation points (although they didn't have punctuation then). But you get what I mean. That draws people's attention to the word that the author wants people to focus on.

He wants the people here, in this verse, to focus on the word "**therefore.**" Now, why on the word "therefore"? It's because Romans 12:1 begins the summary of the *practical application* of the principles, the teachings, the instruction that Paul gave in the first 11 chapters. Now he's going to draw *practical conclusions* to all the doctrinal things that he taught. That is, the things about justification, and sanctification, and about our calling, and about the Holy Spirit, and all of those kinds of things that fill up the first 11 chapters—including chapters 9, 10, and 11 which are glorious things about Israel and our calling and what's going to happen in the future. He's saying here, then, "*In the light of everything that I have given you thus far—here's what you are to do, priests! Sanctify yourselves by being a living sacrifice.*" **A living sacrifice!**

Paul then means that, in light of God's great gifts to us (expounded by him in the preceding 11 chapters), it is *reasonable*... That is a correct translation. Sometimes you will see, in modern Bibles, *spiritual*—and, incidentally, that is a correct alternative. The word only appears one other time in the Bible, in the Greek; and in that place it clearly means "spiritual." But here it means **reasonable**. He's saying, "*This is **right** that we should do it.*" It's reasonable. It's logical. It is rational—that we should do this. That's exactly what he means.

Therefore... This brings a very interesting conclusion to it, though. He is saying then that everything we do, in all of life, is to be ***an act of worship*** in service to God. Everything! We are to live our life as a living sacrifice—*except on those days that you want to do your own thing?* No. No, brethren. God owns us. And He wants our life all the time—every day, 24/7 (as we say today)—as a *living sacrifice*. We are to sacrifice our life to Him, because it cost the life of His Son to give us the privilege of drawing close to Him. And so He has every right... It is logical. It is rational for Him to demand this of you and me. In this case, even as Jesus is portrayed in the offerings of Leviticus 1-7, we are both (1) *the priest* who is making the offering and we are (2) *the offering* that is being sacrificed.

Ephesians 5:1-4 [Paul says...] Be you therefore followers of God, as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us [What did He do? He

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went to the extent of sacrificing His life], and has given Himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savor. But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becomes saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks.

Do you see a similarity between that and Romans 12:1-2? "*Be not conformed to this world.*" That's what he's saying here, in Ephesians 5:1-4. "Be not conformed to this world"—and Paul mentions here the shunning of fornication, uncleanness, covetousness, filthiness, and other things. In other words, sinful behavior that is the way the world does things. The point is that we fulfill the showing forth of God's praises through *being an example* to the world. **Showing forth God's praises** involves *our witness* of how God lives.

But in order to do so requires the sacrificing—the putting to death of human nature, overcoming indwelling sin. And, brethren, as we are finding out, that is not easy. It requires **considerable sacrifice**—disciplining ourselves, controlling ourselves, saying "No" to ourselves. But on the other hand, saying, "*Yes, I need to do this good thing*"—in service, in kindness, in mercy, in love. Either way—positively or negatively—**there is going to be a sacrifice involved in almost any act of love.**

If we are conformed to the same way as what the world is doing, how can we possibly show forth the praises of God? Then, we would be just like them. That's what Peter is talking about—showing forth the praises of God. We won't go into it here, but (as I mentioned earlier) this aspect also included the preaching of the gospel to the world. There the world gets a verbal representation of the praises of God, in what His purpose it.

Now, making acceptable sacrifices through Jesus Christ involves making or doing activities more frequently thought of as being priestly. This involves things like prayer (which you do privately, in your closet). It involves study (which you may do in the early morning, or late evening or whatever). When there's nothing else to bother you, you have private time with God's Word—right before Him. It includes meditation, whenever and wherever. David said, "I meditate on Your word (on Your law) all the day long." In another place (I think it's Psalm 119), he said, "It is my meditation all the day long."

It includes praying about the multitude of subjects that God reveals in His Word. [This includes] things like John Bulharowski was talking about in his sermonette—even praying for the pillars, who appear to be so strong, but something got to them, at least

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for the time. It includes things like Paul mentions in Hebrews 13:15-16. In one place we understand that it says not to let your right hand know what your left hand is doing. It's something you do privately.

Hebrews 13:15 By Him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God [Here is thanksgiving, gratitude.] continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His name.

Meaning, everything that God stands for. That's what "**His name**" is. All of His character—all of His might, and power, and wisdom, and love, and on, and on, and on it goes. To look at God's creation and not appreciate Him is something that I can't understand anymore. It is **so awesome!** That is, the mind that it took to create all of these things, to think them up. There's such a variety of wonderful things there.

I remember Herbert Armstrong saying (I don't know how many number of times) that, when he started to pray, almost the first thing that he did was that he thanked God that He was God.

Hebrews 13:16 But to do good and to communicate [That means to share.] forget not: for with such sacrifices [Sharing, serving, giving is a sacrifice.] God is well pleased.

Nobody else may know that you are doing it. It's private—between you and the recipient of your gift. But this one begins to expand out. It includes other things besides some physical gift that you might give to somebody. It begins to involve things like encouragement, counsel, cheering people up, giving them the benefit of your experiences in the past, the wisdom, the things that you have learned from the experiences that you have gone through with God in former years. And even it includes gentle correction, from time to time—when we see something that may help somebody along the way. So you are communicating, you are sharing those things. That's a **priestly responsibility**. It takes a lot of time to do this. That's a sacrifice.

You know there's something very interesting that shows this—in a place that you would never think about. It's in the food laws. God says that we shouldn't eat this, and we shouldn't eat that. One of the things that He says that we shouldn't eat are bugs. The word in the Hebrews actually means *swarmers*. He says, "*Don't eat any swarmers.*" When you start looking at "the swarmers," they almost all have a characteristic in common. A bee is a swarmer. An ant is a swarmer. A gnat is a swarmer. A mosquito is

a swarmer. A wasp is a swarmer. And it goes on and on.

What do swarmers do? They all congregate together—don't they? And they are, what? Swarmers are constantly in motion. They are all over the place. *"Go to the ant, you sluggard, and be wise."* In that case, it's a good thing to know. *"Busy as a bee,"* we say. But this has a very, very serious downside (when it is applied to us) as well; and we have to be aware. The lesson is this. God says that in the end times that men shall run to and fro. Busy, busy, busy—are they not?

Do you know what it says in Joshua 1:8? He told Joshua, as they were just about ready to go into the land—*"Be strong. Be courageous. Don't depart from My word."* And then He said something that is really strange. He said, *"Don't let My word depart from your mouth."* (Not heart, but mouth.) And there's a very interesting lesson here. What do you do with your mouth, besides talk? It's obvious that God was saying, *"I want you always to speak using My word as the basis for the things that you say. Therefore, it'll be wise; and you'll get along well."* But there's something else here as well. Do you not eat? You eat with your mouth.

Now, what animals did God say that we are allowed to eat? We are allowed to eat those that have a cloven hoof—and those that do what? They chew the cud. Do you know what the lesson is there? He said, *"I want you to **chew on My word.**"* Chew it like a cow would. Masticate it. Chew it up. Study it. Understand it. Look at it from this point of view. Look at it from that point of view. Use this perspective, that perspective, and so forth.

Don't always be "swarming" like the busy bees. You have to take time, and it's going to be a sacrifice—because it's very, very easy in this day and time to be so busy that you don't give God's words the time of day. You aren't eating it. You aren't masticating it. You aren't swallowing it. You aren't digesting it. And it's doing you absolutely no, or maybe very little, good.

A priest has to sacrifice time in his day **every day** to eat and chew God's Word—and not let it depart from his mouth, and get all of the good out of it that you possibly can. "Study to show yourself approved unto God, a workman that needs not be ashamed." [II Timothy 2:15] Do you know what **study** means? It means **be diligent, scrutinize, look into, research.** You can't do that in a minute. You can't do it in 5 minutes. You can spend hours on one verse. Chew it up. Don't let it depart from your mouth.

Learn from the "swarmers." Don't do what they do. It's good to be busy, but to be busy on the right things. If you are that busy with God's Word, it's going to help you to do a priest's job. But to spend the time doing that is quite a sacrifice these days—because

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there is more to do than we can ever do. And Satan has created a world that makes sure you're going to keep busy.

Leviticus 19:2 "Speak unto all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say unto them, 'You shall be holy: for I the LOORD your God am holy.'"

Here the word **holy** means *pure, clean*. This is repeated verbatim in I Peter 1:15-16. That application there is so clear that I don't see how it can be denied, especially when it is connected to the priesthood subject of I Peter 2. Priests must be pure in the conduct of their life, because God is pure. We must be pure to be acceptable to Him, because it was immorality that defiled us in the first place. We must be pure to offer acceptable sacrifices to Him.

God begins the processes by cleansing us by the blood of Jesus Christ, but He expects us to continue it through the keeping of His Word. So, you can see this in many places; but we are purified through the keeping of His Word, in the power of His Spirit. This requires the sacrifice of our life in every aspect of life; and the whole aim is to produce the fruit of God—**love**.