

The Believer's Privileges, Part 2: Access Part 1

Scripture: 1 Peter 2:5b

Code: 60-18

REVIEW

I. THE CORNERSTONE OF OUR PRIVILEGES (v. 4)

II. THE KALEIDOSCOPE OF OUR PRIVILEGES (vv. 5-10)

A. Union (v. 5a) Lesson

B. Access (v. 5b)

"[Believers] are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."

1. The privileged people

a) As compared to other religions Christians enjoy not only union with their Lord, but also admission to His presence. That is a rare privilege not enjoyed by the masses of unredeemed people. Because they are afar from Him and do not know Him, the Bible says they are unwelcome in His presence. That barrier between God and man is reflected in the world's religions. The various deities man invents are remote, indifferent, and apathetic to human needs and problems. Man is willing to appease his idols, but he does not desire to draw near to them. Rather he greatly fears them. b) As highlighted in the New Testament (1) The Old Testament restriction In the Old Testament we see that the average Jew could pray to God and draw into His presence spiritually, but he did not have access to Him physically. Before God came down on Mount Sinai, He warned the people not to come near or even touch the mountain. No one but the High Priest was allowed to enter God's presence--and that only once a year in the Holy of Holies in the Temple. (a) An impure priesthood When the High Priest entered God's presence on the Day of Atonement, it was such a sacred event that he had to go through a ceremonial washing, make a spiritual confession, and offer a sacrifice for his own sin to make sure he was clean before God. (b) A restricted priesthood Old Testament law restricted the offering of sacrifices to the priesthood. Anyone who attempted to usurp the office of a priest was in danger of severe judgment. King Azariah (also called Uzziah) was struck by God with leprosy for doing so (2 Kings 15:5; 2 Chron. 26:16-21). King Saul tried to function like a priest so God cursed his lineage, promising that no king would come from his loins (1 Sam. 13:8-14). When Korah and his rebellious followers attempted to act as priests, the ground opened and swallowed them (Num. 16). (2) The New Testament reality What was limited in the Old Covenant for the High Priest is the unlimited opportunity and privilege of every Christian. According to 1 Peter 1:5, believers are both the Temple of God and the priests who serve in it. What is more, verse 9 says that we are a royal priesthood. As a chosen race and holy nation, we are given access to God.

2. The priestly purpose

Although we acknowledge that we are priests and therefore have admission to God, many don't really know what a priest is. So we need to examine the Old Testament priesthood to understand our position as priests. Under the Old Covenant the priest's main job was to offer acceptable sacrifices to God, and so it is with us. First Peter 2:5 says we're "to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." a) The makeup of a priest There are three passages in the Old Testament that, when combined, give us a good picture of the makeup of a priest: Exodus 28-29, Leviticus 8-9, and Malachi 2. Exodus 28-29 lays out God's standards for the priesthood--the office is defined and its functions are described. Leviticus 8-9 contains the inauguration of the priesthood. Malachi 2 was

written much later historically. It helps to define the priesthood by comparing the apostate priesthood of Malachi's time with the true priesthood instituted in the time of Moses. In those passages we see ten characteristics of a priest, and they parallel the nature and features of the believer's priesthood.

(1) Priests are elect

(a) The Old Testament precedent According to Exodus 28, God's priests are chosen by Him. In verse 1 God says to Moses, "Bring near to yourself Aaron your brother, and his sons with him, from among the sons of Israel, to minister as priest to Me--Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar, Aaron's sons." No one volunteered for the priesthood. There weren't any applications to fill out and file with Moses. No one voted on who the priests would be. No spiritual or intellectual aptitude tests were given. God sovereignly chose Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, Ithamar, and their descendants to serve as priests.

Levi: God's Unusual Choice Aaron and his sons were of the tribe of Levi. That was the tribe in Israel from which all the priests were chosen. But that entire tribe was cursed by Jacob, Levi's father: "Simeon and Levi are brothers; their swords are implements of violence. Let not my soul enter into their council; let not my glory be united with their assembly; because in their anger they slew men, and in their self-will they lamed oxen" (Gen. 49:5-6). Levi was a violent man. Genesis 34 records how he and Simeon were involved in slaughtering the men of an entire city. When they lamed oxen they were destroying the ability of the owner to feed his family. Jacob went on to say, "Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce; and their wrath, for it is cruel. I will disperse them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel" (Gen. 49:7). The Lord chose His priests from a tribe that was known for its cursedness, violence, and sinfulness. Levi was a tribe of the morally feeble, and was probably one of the least respected in Israel. Yet it was from that very tribe that God chose the Old Testament priests.

(b) The New Testament parallel Our priesthood is also an elect priesthood. Jesus said to His disciples, "You did not choose Me, but I chose you" (John 15:16). We are the elect of God who were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4). In God's sight the only true priests today are Christians and all true Christians are priests.

God's unusual choice of Levi and the Old Testament priesthood finds its parallel in the New Testament:

(i) Luke 5:32--Jesus said, "I have not come to call righteous men but sinners to repentance."

(ii) Hebrews 7:28--"The Law appoints men as high priests who are weak." Under the Old Covenant God's chosen priests were weak. And God is still choosing the same kind of people. Isn't it wonderful that we who were weak and cursed with sin have been chosen to be priests of the Most High God?

(iii) 1 Corinthians 1:26-29-- "Consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised, God has chosen, the things that are not, that He might nullify the things that are, that no man should boast before God." God continues to choose His priests from among the lowly, just as He chose Aaron of the tribe of Levi.

(2) Priests are specially cleansed

(a) The Old Testament precedent Before a priest could begin his ministry, he needed to be cleansed from sin. Leviticus 8:6 says that "Moses had Aaron and his sons come near, and washed them with water." That was an outward symbol of their inward need. Next Moses "put the tunic on [Aaron] and girded him with the sash, and clothed him with the robe, and put the ephod [apron] on him; and he girded him with the artistic band of the ephod, with which he tied it to him. He then placed the breastpiece on him, and in the breastpiece he put the Urim and the Thummim [by which God could reveal His will]. He also placed the turban on his head, and on the turban, at its front, he placed the golden plate, the holy crown, just as the Lord had commanded Moses." Moses then ... poured some of the anointing oil on Aaron's head and anointed him, to consecrate him. Next Moses had Aaron's sons come near and clothed them with tunics, and girded them with sashes, and bound caps on them, just as the Lord had commanded Moses. "Then he brought the bull of the sin offering, and Aaron and his sons laid their hands on the head of the bull of the sin offering. Next Moses slaughtered it" (vv. 7-15). First Aaron and his sons needed to be washed with water, then they were anointed with oil, and finally their sins were atoned for with blood. All that represented their

need to be cleansed from sin. Moses then "presented the ram of the burnt offering.... "Then he presented the second ram, the ram of ordination; and Aaron and his sons laid their hands on the head of the ram. And Moses slaughtered it and took some of its blood and put it on the lobe of Aaron's right ear, and on the thumb of his right hand, and on the big toe of his right foot. He also had Aaron's sons come near; and Moses put some of the blood on the lobe of their right ear, on the thumb of their right hand, and on the big toe of their right foot."Moses then sprinkled the rest of the blood around on the altar. And he took the fat, and the fat tail, and all the fat that was on the entrails, and the lobe of the liver and the two kidneys and their fat and the right thigh. And from the basket of unleavened bread that was before the Lord, he took one unleavened cake and one cake of bread mixed with oil and one wafer, and placed them on the portions of fat and on the right thigh. He then put all these on the hands of Aaron and on the hands of his sons, and presented them as a wave offering before the Lord. Then Moses took them from their hands and offered them up in smoke on the altar with the burnt offering. They were an ordination offering for a soothing aroma; it was an offering by fire to the Lord...."Moses took some of the anointing oil and some of the blood which was on the altar, and sprinkled it on Aaron, on his garments, on his sons, and on the garments of his sons with him; and he consecrated Aaron, his garments, his sons, and the garments of his sons with him" (vv. 18-30). The washing, anointing, and all the offerings demonstrated that a priest could not function until he was fully cleansed--from top to bottom, ear to toe. The blood on his right ear was apparently to sanctify his ear for hearing the Word of God, the blood on his right thumb to sanctify his hands for the work of God, and the blood on his right toe to sanctify his feet for walking with God.(b) The New Testament parallelJust as with the Old Testament priests, we could not be called priests if we had not been cleansed from our sin.(i) Titus 2:14--Christ "gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds."(ii) Titus 3:5--"He saved us not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit."(iii) Ephesians 5:26--Christ washed us "with the Word."(iv) 1 Peter 1:2--Christ sprinkled us "with His blood."(3) Priests are specially clothed(a) The Old Testament precedentOnce a priest was cleansed from sin, he was then clothed for service. In Exodus 28:42 Moses was instructed to make linen undershorts for the priests, which apparently symbolized sexual purity. As we learned from Leviticus 8 they also wore a tunic, a belt, a robe, and an ephod including a decorative band. A breastpiece went over the ephod and a turban was placed on the priest's head, with a golden plate at the front of the turban. All those special garments symbolized the unique call of a priest to virtue and identification with God.(b) The New Testament parallelPsalm 132:9 says, "Let Thy priests be clothed with righteousness." As a Christian you are a priest who has been clothed with the righteousness of Christ, for as 1 Corinthians 1:30 says, "You are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption."(4) Priests are anointed(a) The Old Testament precedentLeviticus 8 tells us that the priests were anointed. Verse 12 shows Moses pouring oil on Aaron's head. Verse 30 describes Moses taking some of the anointing oil from the altar and sprinkling it on Aaron and his garments, and on his sons and their garments. That identified the priesthood as the special class on whom the power and presence of God would rest. The anointing oil symbolized God's Spirit.(b) The New Testament parallelSimilarly, New Testament believers have been anointed by the Holy Spirit:(i) 1 John 2:20--The apostle John said to believers, "You have an anointing from the Holy One."(ii) 1 John 2:27--"The anointing which you received from Him abides in you." Who abides in the believer? The Holy Spirit. The Christian's body is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 3:16). The anointing of the Spirit gives power. Acts 1:8 says, "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you." The priests in the Old Testament could do what nobody else could do, go where no one else could go, and act in ways that no one else could act. Their special authority, privileges, rights, and powers have been granted to the New Testament believer by the anointing of the Spirit.(5) Priests are specially prepared(a) The Old Testament

precedent The priests were not just anointed and empowered for service; they were also specially prepared for it. After all the preparation we have seen so far, Leviticus 8:33 adds, "And you shall not go outside the doorway of the tent of meeting for seven days, until the day that the period of your ordination is fulfilled; for he will ordain you through seven days." After the seven days the priests were instructed to give special offerings that would prepare them for their office (Lev. 9:4). Then "Moses and Aaron went into the tent of meeting. When they came out and blessed the people, the glory of the Lord appeared to all the people. Then fire came out from before the Lord and consumed the burnt offering and the portions of fat on the altar; and when all the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces" (Lev. 9:23-24). Before a person could actually function as a priest, his heart needed to be prepared. Those seven days were symbolic of spiritual preparedness--the readiness of mind and heart that took into consideration the seriousness of priesthood.

(b) The New Testament parallel Similarly, every believer should seriously consider the great privileges and responsibilities of spiritual service. When a person makes a profession of faith in Jesus Christ, the Spirit of God usually ripens the marvelous gift of salvation before there is a readiness for spiritual ministry. That time of preparation readies the heart of the believer for priestly service.

(6) Priests are ordained to obedience (a) The Old Testament precedent Leviticus 10 is one of the saddest portions of Scripture--a tragic account of priestly disobedience. There we see two newly called, cleansed, clothed, anointed, and prepared priests embarking upon their ministry. Fire had come out from the Lord's presence at the end of their seven days of preparation and burned up their sacrifices. The account continues: "Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took their respective fire pans, and after putting fire in them, placed incense on it and offered strange fire before the Lord, which He had not commanded them. And fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed them, and they died before the Lord" (vv. 1-2). Can you imagine the shock? The whole assembly witnessed that event. Aaron must have been stunned, but Moses explained, "It is what the Lord spoke, saying, 'By those who come near Me I will be treated as holy, and before all the people I will be honored'" (v. 3). The message was clear: every priest is ordained to obedience. Those who have the privilege of coming near to God must treat Him as holy.

(b) The New Testament parallel New Testament believers are called to the same priestly obedience. Peter said, "As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance" (1 Pet. 1:14).

(7) Priests love God's Word God's priests were to have a high regard for the Word of God. (a) Malachi 2:1-8--The prophet Malachi indicted the apostate priesthood of his time by comparing them with the God-ordained principles given through Moses: "'This commandment is for you, O priests. If you do not listen, if you do not take it to heart to give honor to My name,' says the Lord of hosts, 'then I will send the curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings; and indeed, I have cursed them already, because you are not taking it to heart. Behold, I am going to rebuke your offspring, and I will spread refuse on your faces, the refuse of your feasts; and you will be taken away with it. Then you will know that I have sent this commandment to you, that My covenant may continue with Levi,' says the Lord of hosts" (vv. 1-4). Looking back to the beginning of that covenant, the Lord said through Malachi, "My covenant with him was one of life and peace, and I gave them to him as an object of reference; so he revered Me, and stood in awe of My name. True instruction was in his mouth, and unrighteousness was not found on his lips; He walked with Me in peace and uprightness, and he turned many back from iniquity. For the lips of a priest should preserve knowledge, and men should seek instruction from his mouth; for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts. But as for you, you have turned aside from the way; you have caused many to stumble by the instruction; you have corrupted the covenant of Levi" (vv. 5-8).

(b) Exodus 32:26-28--This text illustrates how seriously the early priests took the Word of God. Moses had gone up into the mountain to get the law, and when he returned, the people were worshipping a golden calf. "Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said, 'Whoever is for the Lord, come to me!' And all the sons of Levi gathered together to him. And he said to them, 'Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, "every man of you put his sword upon his thigh, and go back and forth from gate to gate in

the camp, and kill every man his brother, and every man his friend, and every man his neighbor.' So the sons of Levi did as Moses instructed, and about three thousand men of the people fell that day." In the beginning the priests took the Word of God seriously, and that's the standard Malachi pointed to when he rebuked the priesthood of his own day.(c) Deuteronomy 33:10--Of the tribe of Levi Moses said, "They shall teach Thine ordinances to Jacob, and Thy Law to Israel." From the beginning God designed the priesthood to be faithful to His Word.(d) Numbers 25:10-13--"The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 'Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, has turned away My wrath from the sons of Israel, in that he was jealous with My jealousy among them, so that I did not destroy the sons of Israel in My jealousy. Therefore say, "Behold, I give him My covenant of peace; and it shall be for him and his descendants after him, a covenant of perpetual priesthood."'" When Malachi referred to the Lord's covenant "with him" (Mal. 2:5) , he was probably speaking of Phinehas. Phinehas was a zealous priest and is an emblem of a godly priesthood who takes the Word of God seriously.(8) Priests walk with GodA priest had a walk with God. Malachi 2:6 says of God's priest, "He walked with Me in peace and uprightness."(9) Priests have an impact on sinnersMalachi also affirms that a priest was to have a positive impact on sinners. The priesthood Malachi looked back to "turned many back from iniquity" (Mal. 2:6). (10) Priests are God's messengersA priest was to be the Lord's messenger: "The lips of a priest should preserve knowledge, and men should seek instruction from his mouth; for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts" (Mal. 2:7). ConclusionHow do the qualifications of the Old Testament priesthood relate to the New Testament believer? First Peter 2:5 says that we are priests. As priests we are chosen, cleansed, clothed with righteousness, anointed with the Holy Spirit, prepared for service, and ordained to obedience. We are to have a high regard for the Word of God, walk with God, have an impact on sinners, and be the messengers of the Lord. That was true of the Old Testament priesthood, and it is also true of us.

Focusing on the Facts

1. Who enjoys the privilege of access to God?
2. Explain the differing access to God allowed under the Old and New Covenants.
3. In the Old Testament era, what steps were necessary before the High Priest entered the Temple (see p. 2)?
4. Old Testament law restricted the offering of sacrifices _____.
5. What three Old Testament passages, when combined, give us a picture of the makeup of a priest? What is the emphasis of each passage?
6. Who appointed God's priests (Exo. 28:1)?
7. What is similar about those chosen for the priesthood from the tribe of Levi and those God now chooses as priests?
8. Before an Old Testament priest could begin his ministry, he needed to be _____.
9. In what way has Christ cleansed us for priestly service?
10. In the Old Testament the priests were specially clothed. What is the special clothing of a believer's priesthood?
11. New Testament believers have been anointed by _____.
12. What did Old Testament priests need in addition to empowerment and anointing?
13. What does Leviticus 10:1-2 show us that God's priests are ordained to?
14. What does Malachi 2 teach us about four of the priests intended functions?

Pondering the Principles

1. One thing that believers enjoy as priests is intimate access to God. Thomas Watson wrote, "God has made His children, by adoption, nearer to Himself than the angels. The angels are the friends of Christ; believers are His members" (cited in A Puritan Golden Treasury, I.D.E. Thomas, ed.

[Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1977], p. 50). A relationship of intimacy involves both the privilege of access and enjoyment, and the responsibility of conforming one's behavior and thinking to further that relationship. As you consider the privileges that are yours as a believer-priest, how are you encouraged to further your relationship with God?

2. What we have learned about a priest's makeup affirms that God's priests are a people set apart to reflect His character. Thomas Watson also said, "It is one of the saddest sights to see a man lift up his hands in prayer, and with those hands oppress; to hear the same tongue praise God at one time, and at another lie and slander; to hear a man in words profess God, and in works deny Him. Oh How unworthy is this!" (All Things for Good [Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1986], p. 120). As those who come from God's very presence we serve as God's representatives. What kind of God do you represent to those who know you? What can you do to allow others to see God more clearly in you?

Available online at: <http://www.gty.org>

COPYRIGHT (C) 2026 Grace to You

You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (<https://www.gty.org/about#copyright>).