

The Believer's Privileges, Part 3: Access Part 2

Scripture: 1 Peter 2:5b

Code: 60-19

INTRODUCTION

Christians live in the confidence that God blesses His people. When we are faithful to Him He honors us. God does not miss His target when He blesses or judges. Ephesians 1:3 declares that "has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ." Galatians 3:9 says, "Those who are of faith are blessed."

REVIEW

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

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

A. Union (v. 5a)

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

2. The priestly purpose

a) The makeup of a priest Lesson b) The mission of a priest As believers it is important that we understand not only who we are as priests, but also what our function is. (1) The Old Testament precedent (a) The priestly office The function of the Old Testament priesthood was to offer animal and other sacrifices to God. Animal sacrifices ceased to have meaning after the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross; therefore Peter said that the sacrifices now to be offered are spiritual sacrifices. Similarly, God's priesthood is no longer selected from the tribe of Levi through the loins of Aaron. It is a spiritual priesthood made up of believers in Jesus Christ. (b) The priestly offering The Old Testament priests knew that any sacrifices offered to God had to be acceptable. For example, any lamb offered had to be the best--without blemish. The sacrifice itself had to be offered in such a way that it violated none of God's commands. Aaron's sons lost their lives by offering sacrifices in an unacceptable manner. Christians also are responsible for offering sacrifices that are acceptable to God. (c) The priestly right Not every sacrifice offered to God was acceptable. King Saul, contrary to God's express command, sacrificed animals he had taken as spoils of war (1 Sam. 10:8; 13:8-14). God cursed Saul's entire line, rejecting both Saul and his heirs for the kingship of Israel. (2) The New Testament parallel The purpose of a believer's spiritual sacrifices is God's approval. Believers are to offer "spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God coming through Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 2:5). Because Christ is the sole mediator between God and man (1 Tim. 2:15), we must offer our sacrifices in His name, which means they must be consistent with His will, for God to be pleased. In John 14:12-14 Jesus says, "I go to the Father.... Whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it." The key phrase in Jesus' statement is "whatever you ask in My name." That means that whatever a believer asks for must be consistent with who He is--His will, His plan, and His Kingdom. A believer's offering to God must be consistent with the person and work of Christ. It must fit into His plan and be conformed to His design as revealed in the Word of God. It must be a pure sacrifice, springing out of pure motives and

extending to a pure goal. The believer's goal is to honor God. All his actions are to honor God. For a believer's spiritual sacrifices to honor God they must be in conformity to His Word. This is what the Word specifies:

(a) Spiritual sacrifice involves the whole person. Romans 12--This is the beginning of the application section of that great epistle. In verse 1 Paul says, "I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God [that which God has mercifully done for believers as recorded in Rom. 1-11], to present you bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship." When combined with Peter's wording in 1 Peter 2:5, the idea of the two verses is, "Because of God's mercy to you, you are now a holy priesthood and the Lord wants you to offer up spiritual sacrifices. Therefore you must start your priestly work by presenting yourselves as a living and holy sacrifice. Believers are priests involved in the spiritual service of worship. That service begins with the presentation of our bodies as a living and holy sacrifice. The term "body" obviously includes the mind because Romans 12:2 says, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect." All your faculties --your feet, hands, mind, eyes, mouth, ears--are to be used for God's glory.

ii. Romans 6--The apostle Paul said to the Roman church that before they were saved, their members--bodily parts--were slaves to sin (v. 13). But when they believed they became slaves of righteousness (v. 18). Every part of the believer's body is to be given in sacrifice to God for holy purposes.

iii. 1 Corinthians 9--Paul said, "I buffet my body and make it my slave" (v. 27). Paul disciplined himself that he might present all his faculties to God. As priests, we do not present dead animals to God, but our live selves--all that we are. God wants a living sacrifice.

iv. Hebrews 11--The classic illustration of a living sacrifice is Abraham. Abraham took Isaac to Mount Moriah because God told him to take his son and offer him as a sacrifice. Just as Abraham lifted his knife to plunge it into the heart of Isaac, God stopped him and provided a ram for a substitute sacrifice. If Abraham had killed his son, Isaac would have been a dead sacrifice. That would have been a painful thing for Abraham to do, but Abraham would have been made a living sacrifice because in killing Isaac, he would have sacrificed all his hopes and dreams. The promises that God had given to him--that his descendants would be "as the stars of heaven in number, and innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore" (v. 12) --would have been sacrificed by the death of Isaac. Believers are not to offer something that is dead. We are to offer everything we are, everything we have, and everything we hope to be--all our dreams, hopes, aspirations, and abilities. That's the kind of sacrifice New Testament believers are called on to make.

(b) Spiritual sacrifice involves constant praise. Hebrews 13:15 says to us New Covenant priests, "Through Him [Christ] ... let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name." Praise is an offering that God requires of His priests.

i. Reciting God's attributes. In the Old Testament, praising God typically centered around reciting God's glorious attributes. The psalms have many examples of that kind of praise. To cite just one, Psalm 104 says, "Bless the Lord, O my soul! O Lord my God, Thou art very great; Thou art clothed with splendor and majesty, covering Thyself with light as with a cloak" (vv. 1-2). Praise is reciting God's attributes from the heart--exalting Him for His wisdom and knowledge, and honoring and revering God for who He is.

ii. Reciting God's works. God is great not only for who He is but also for what He has done. If there were no other reason for studying the Old Testament, its record of God's works would be enough. Praise is not merely repeating the phrase "praise the Lord" over and over again. It is exalting God by reciting His attributes and works. Christians should be relentless in praising God. If you are a Christian, your whole being should be filled with praise and thanksgiving. That is an acceptable spiritual sacrifice. The Christian life isn't defined by how many times you attend church, the number of functions you go to, how many Christian records you have, or how many seminars you have attended. True spiritual life means that you have given all your faculties as a living sacrifice to God to do with as He will.

(c) Spiritual sacrifice involves good works. Hebrews 13:16 directs us "not [to] neglect doing good ... for with such sacrifices God is pleased." We are to do good, which is the opposite of sin, and thereby honor God through our

conduct. When you do good in word or deed by offering reproof, restoration, love, and help, you are offering a spiritual sacrifice in the name of Christ that glorifies God.(d) Spiritual sacrifice involves the giving of gifts.i. Hebrews 13:16--"Do not neglect ... sharing; for with such sacrifices God is pleased." That involves sharing your resources to meet the needs of someone else.ii. Philippians 4:10-18--When Paul wrote to the Philippians he was a prisoner in Rome. Because they loved Paul, they sent him support, and these verses record his gratitude: "I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that ... you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned before, but you lacked opportunity. Not that I speak from want; for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me" (vv. 10-13). This passage is not only a lesson in gratitude, but also a lesson in sharing. Even though Paul didn't need the gift, he said to the Philippians, "Nevertheless, you have done well to share with me in my affliction. 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; for even in Thessalonica you sent a gift more than once for my needs. Not that I seek the gift itself, but I seek for the profit which increases to your account" (vv. 14-17). God blesses the generous, and Paul was glad that the Philippians had put themselves in a position to be blessed. He was especially pleased because their gift was an "acceptable sacrifice well pleasing to God" (v. 18). What About Me? Our response to the needs of others is often something like, "If I give to them, what will happen when I am in need? Who will take care of my needs?" In Philippians 4:19 Paul says, "God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus." Nothing makes a pastor more joyful than to see his beloved church offering up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God, functioning as a holy priesthood, and thereby entering into the place of blessing (vv. 16-18). Paul could rejoice because he knew that the same God who had met all his needs would meet the needs of the generous believer.(e) Spiritual sacrifice involves reaching the lostIn Romans 15:16 Paul says, "[I'm] a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles, ministering as a priest the gospel of God, that my offering of the Gentiles might become acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit." Paul viewed the souls He had been privileged to lead to Christ as an offering to God. We should be able to say with Paul, "Lord Jesus, this friend (neighbor, classmate, or relative) is my sacrifice to you. Thank You for using me as your instrument in leading that person to Christ."(f) Spiritual sacrifice involves loveEphesians 5:2 says, "Walk in love, just as Christ also loved you, and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma." Christ's love for us resulted in the sacrifice of Himself--and that was a sacrifice acceptable to God. We are to exhibit the humility of Christ. That kind of sacrificial love for one another is well pleasing to God.(g) Spiritual sacrifice involves prayerIn Revelation 8:3 we see that prayer is a spiritual sacrifice: "Another angel came and stood at the altar, holding a golden censer; and much incense was given to him, that he might add it to the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, went up before God."ConclusionSpiritual sacrifice begins when we offer everything we are to God. Praise, doing good, generosity, evangelism, love, and prayer are all sacrifices that should follow that initial offering of one's self to God. They are all a sweet aroma in the nostrils of God. As a royal priesthood it is our privilege as believers to offer up those spiritual sacrifices. When we gather as a church, we do not gather as an end in itself. Unless we go out from fellowship and instruction in the Word to offer up spiritual sacrifices, we fail in both our worship and our response to worship.

Focusing on the Facts

1. What was the function of the priests in the Old Testament?
2. Why is it no longer necessary to offer animal sacrifices to God?
3. A believer's offering to God must be consistent with the _____ and _____ of Christ.

4. What is necessary for a believer's spiritual sacrifices to be honoring to God?
5. Where does our spiritual service begin?
6. What does Romans 12:2 confirm regarding the mind's role in spiritual sacrifice?
7. Believers are not to offer God something that is dead. What are we to offer Him?
8. What is praise?
9. What is true spiritual life?
10. What does the Bible say about giving as a spiritual sacrifice?
11. How did Paul view the souls he was privileged to bring to Christ (Rom. 15:16)?
12. Does love involve sacrifice? Explain.

Pondering the Principles

1. In a society that advocates freedom from responsibility we often forget that all privileges have corresponding duties. In the seventeenth century Samuel Bolton wrote, "All delight in duties arises from a suitability of spirit in the doing of them. If there is no grace within the heart to answer to the call of duty from without, if there is no principle in the heart agreeable to the precept of the Word, the heart will never delight in them. This, then, is the reason why a godly man conducts himself well in duty, not merely because it is commanded, but because he has the nature which truly and rightly responds to the command" (The True Bounds of Christian Freedom [Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1978 reprint], pp. 144-45). As a believer you enjoy the privilege of a priest and the duty to offer spiritual sacrifices. Take a moment now to exercise your priestly office and offer God a spiritual sacrifice of praise for His grace extended to you.
2. In Precious Remedies Against Satan's Devices Thomas warned that Satan often confronts believers with the supposed impossibility of performing our spiritual duties. His advice: "Dwell more upon the necessity of the service and duty, than on the difficulty that doth attend the duty.... Though such ... services be hard and difficult, yet are they exceeding necessary for the honor of God, and the keeping up [of] his name in the world, and the keeping under of sin, and the strengthening of weak graces, and ... stopping the mouths of unrighteous souls, who are ready to take all advantages to blaspheme the name of God, and throw dirt and contempt upon his people and ways" ([Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1987 reprint], pp. 117-18). Consider Brooks's advice the next time you are presented with the opportunity for spiritual sacrifice, but are tempted to turn away because of the apparent difficulty involved.

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