



First Baptist Church At The Villages

Discipleship Group Lesson

Series: Under Authority • Title: Our Priestly Calling • Main Passage: 1 Peter 2:1-10 •

for use by groups 5/27 - 6/1/2019

Main Point

God has called all Christ followers to join Jesus in His priestly ministry, ridding themselves of those attitudes and behaviors that splinter unity and exercising their priesthood through unified community.

Introduction

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

What comes to mind when you hear or think of a priest or priesthood? Is it positive or negative? Why?

What is the role or function of the priesthood?

Is the role of the priest still valid today? Explain.

Jesus' death on the cross and resurrection from the grave satisfied once and for all the Old Testament sacrificial system and put an end to the need for a priesthood to carry out the rituals associated with that system. However, Jesus' death and resurrection did not relegate the priesthood to the trash heap, but instead revitalized it along a different path. The Book of Hebrews repeatedly refers to Jesus as our priest or high priest (Heb. 2:17; 3:1; 4:14-15; 5:5-6,10; 7:16-17, 21,26; 8:1; 9:11; 10:21). The apostle Paul identified himself as a priest (Rom. 15:15-16). And in our passage today, Peter proclaimed that all believers serve as a priesthood of God (1 Pet. 2:5, 9).

Understanding

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ 1 Peter 2:1-3. (The Character of Our Priesthood)

Though Peter had not used the term “priesthood” by this point in his letter, he had begun moving the conversation in that direction. From these verses, how would you describe the character of those who make up the revitalized priesthood?

What are the distinctions between the various terms used in verse 1 describing what you should “rid yourselves of” if you are a believer? What do all of these have in common?

If verse 1 describes the priest’s relationship with other people, what do you learn about the priest’s relationship with God from verses 2-3?

Sometimes the New Testament utilizes the images of “newborn infants” and “milk” to portray immature believers. Such is not the case here. Peter addressed believers who had already or likely soon would suffer persecution for their faith, not exactly an indication of immaturity. Peter’s point was not the immaturity of “newborn infants,” but their “desire” (a strong word, perhaps better translated as “craving”) for the nourishment provided by “milk.” As believers align themselves under the high priest Jesus, their priesthood will be characterized by a deep longing for the nourishment of the “pure milk of the word” of God.

By stating, “that you may grow up into your salvation,” Peter was not suggesting that individuals can somehow grow themselves into a relationship with God apart from the grace and sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. Rather, for believers who trust in Jesus’ atoning work, they receive the unmerited gift of eternal life: salvation. The more you “grow up into your salvation,” that is, the more you mature in faith and obedience, the more your salvation means to you. But only those who “have tasted that the Lord is good” (an allusion to Ps. 34:8) will have the craving for the nourishment of God’s Word and the desire to grow further into their salvation.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ 1 Peter 2:4-9. (The Calling of Our Priesthood)

Look at Exodus 19:5-6; Deuteronomy 7:6; Psalm 118:22; Isaiah 8:14; 28:16. Why do you think Peter drew so heavily from the Old Testament at this point?

What do these Old Testament passages tell us about our calling as priests?

Notice the order Peter followed in these verses. In verse 4, he spoke of believers coming “to him, a living stone.” With those words, Peter both looked back to “the Lord” in verse 3 and forward to describing Him as “rejected by people but chosen and honored by God,” a clear reference to Jesus Christ. Once “you come to him,” then you begin to become like Him, as indicated in verse 5. That is, those who come to the “living stone” (singular) become “living stones” (plural) themselves.

Those who come to Jesus, the High Priest of Christianity, are themselves “being built to be a holy priesthood.” Coming to the High Priest who offered Himself as the perfect sacrifice results in His followers likewise starting “to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (see Rom. 12:1). One does not come to the “great high priest” (Heb. 4:14) without likewise being called to join Him in His priestly ministry.

The call to priestly service is indeed a call to sacrifice, but not to spiritual deprivation. Look again at verse 9 and all the compelling descriptions Peter heaped up in expressing the status of those called by God. How might those descriptions have impacted the original, persecuted recipients of Peter’s letter? How can they impact you today?

According to Peter, why has God made His people to be priests and given them the exalted status that He has?

| ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ 1 Peter 2:10. (The Culmination of Our Priesthood)

While verse 10 culminates this section, it also circles back to the opening of the section—verse 1. What connection do you see between verses 1 and 10?

What does it mean to be “God’s people”? To “have received mercy”?

When Peter said his readers “once...were not a people,” he certainly was not implying that they had not been human or that they had no common characteristics. In the first verse of his letter, Peter had identified his recipients as being in several distinct regions of Asia Minor (see 1:1). Regional distinctions and rivalries no doubt came into play between the various groups of people. Quite likely, those things they were to “rid” themselves of in 1 Peter 2:1 had separated them as part of their geographic distinctions. No group can be “a people” when shredded and torn apart by the attitudes and actions Peter had earlier addressed.

But having rid themselves of their past rejection of Jesus, as well as the dividing wedges of 1:1, they had now become “God’s people,” a community united by common submission to the single High Priest, Jesus. Likewise, at one point they “had not received mercy” (nor shown it, likely) because they were outside of “God’s people.” But with their conversion and acceptance into the people of God and the corresponding priesthood of Christ, Peter could say, “Now you have received mercy,” as well as begun to show it in priestly fashion.

Application

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

If Peter had directed his letter to you, what would he likely have urged you to “rid yourself of”?

What does it mean to you that you, as a believer, have been called to serve as part of a holy, royal priesthood? How do you exercise that calling? Are there areas of your life where you have difficulty exercising your priestly calling? Explain.

Does a sense of community and unity, or lack thereof, make it easier or more difficult for you to carry out your priestly calling? Explain. What can you do to facilitate a stronger sense of unity and priestly effectiveness?

Pray

Ask God to help each participant in your group adopt the attitude and behavior of a priest. Thank Him for His graciousness in calling all believers to join in the priestly ministry of Jesus. Seek His guidance in strengthening the effectiveness of your collective priesthood through unity within the group.

Commentary

| 1 Peter 2:1-10

2:1. “Rid” carries the idea of taking off a suit of clothes. Previously, as pagans, these Christians had clothed themselves with all manner of wickedness—deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander. They were to remove and throw away such clothing. These words concern believers’ relationships with one another and with the world. Believers are not to deceive others. Deceit includes all hypocrisy—pretending something other than the truth. Neither are believers to envy others. Envy reveals a failure to rejoice in God’s gifts to us and to live in gratitude for His generosity. Slander means “speaking against” others in rumors, false accusations, gossip, or harsh criticism. All such speech violates the command to love that Peter had mentioned a few sentences earlier (1 Pet. 1:22).

2:2. The apostle resumed his earlier analogy of the new birth (1 Pet. 1:23) and compared the readers to newborn infants. This does not necessarily imply they were recent converts or spiritually immature. Peter’s emphasis here was on the natural craving of an infant for its mother’s milk, not on the readers’ spiritual condition. Desire means “to crave.” They were to desire God’s milk with the kind of craving an infant has for its mother’s milk. Peter called this milk unadulterated, meaning “pure”; it is devoid of impurities or anything to dilute it. Furthermore, it is spiritual, as opposed to the physical milk a baby seeks. Obviously Bible study is one source of this milk. The apostle then spelled out the reason for drinking deeply of this milk: that you may grow by it in your salvation. The new birth is only the beginning of our salvation. We must not stop there, as if receiving salvation is all there is. We must continue to grow in that salvation; and we mature only by drinking of the unadulterated spiritual milk that alone produces spiritual growth and maturity.

2:3. Peter then arrived at the point that enables us to understand the nature of this spiritual milk. In saying they had tasted that the Lord is good, Peter implied these Asian Christians should continue to drink what they

already tasted. In other words, the spiritual milk they needed centered in Christ Himself. The apostle likely took this idea from Psalm 34:8, which refers to tasting the Lord to see that He, the God of Israel, is good. In applying this verse to our Lord, Peter implied Jesus' Deity in the strongest way possible. To grow in your Christian life, you absolutely must remain in constant, daily fellowship with Jesus Christ. Daily immersion of yourself in God's Word is a valuable discipline in drawing you close to your Savior. Periods of deep, concentrated prayer unite your heart with the living Lord. Periods of meditation on God's Word or listening to what your Lord has to say molds you in His image.

2:4. Many years earlier, Jesus had given Simon the nickname "Rock" (petros in Greek, from which the name Peter comes). Here the apostle nicknamed "Rock" described Jesus as a living stone. (See Psalm 118:22, which refers to the cornerstone that the builders rejected, and also see Peter's use of this psalm in v. 7.) The world at large had rejected Jesus, but God had chosen Him and declared Him valuable. Jesus is the chosen One, and we are chosen because we are in Him. Our entire identity is wrapped up in Him.

2:5. Because of our relation to the resurrected and living Lord, we too can be called living stones (but not in the same sense as Jesus). Just as stones were used to build the temple of God in Jerusalem, so we are being built into a spiritual house, a temple, to God. God now dwells in His people, not in a building (1 Cor. 3:16-17; 6:19). Then Peter changed to another word picture and described believers as priests who offer spiritual sacrifices. Under the old covenant the priests of Israel sacrificed bulls and goats in the temple. As Christians, we are priests of the new covenant who offer spiritual sacrifices to God. These sacrifices are truly acceptable to God, because they are offered through Jesus Christ. Peter specified the nature of these spiritual gifts in verse 9.

2:6. Peter then cited a series of texts from the Hebrew Scriptures on which he based his comments. "It stands" in Scripture is a solemn formula for citing quotations from Scripture as the Word of God. Peter first quoted Isaiah 28:16 as it appears in the Septuagint, a Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures. The Septuagint was the Bible of many in the early church, particularly those who spoke or read Greek. Isaiah had condemned Israel for rejecting the Lord's message and for relying on pagan nations for their support. Through Isaiah, God told Israel He was laying the true foundation stone on which His people were to be built. A cornerstone was the great stone lying at the corner of a building uniting one wall to another. This foundational cornerstone supports everything else and ties it all together. The cornerstone God was laying in Zion was either God Himself or the Messiah. Thus whoever believes in Him will never be put to shame. Those trusting in Jesus never have to worry about whether He will disappoint them. God made that clear to Isaiah, to Israel, and to us.

2:7. Peter pointed out a great difference between those who believe in Jesus as their Lord and those who do not. God gives honor to those who believe. The unbelieving, on the other hand, will be disconcerted to discover that the stone they rejected . . . has become the cornerstone. Here Peter quoted Psalm 118:22. This verse could describe an event in the construction of the temple or perhaps it was a proverbial saying from that

period. “Cornerstone” here may mean either a foundational cornerstone as in Isaiah 28:16 or the topmost capstone. Though rejected by the leaders of Israel and Rome, Jesus was the most important stone of the true temple, the people of God.

2:8. Peter next quoted Isaiah 8:14. In this verse, Isaiah said God should be a rock of sanctuary to His people. Instead, they failed to obey God, and they stumbled over Him as they would a huge rock placed in their paths. In a similar manner, Jesus the Messiah is a sanctuary to believers, but the One over whom unbelievers stumble. The statement “they were destined for this” expresses God’s sovereignty, but it does not mean unbelievers have no responsibility for disobeying the message. They reject Jesus as Savior and suffer the consequences.

2:9. Peter then identified implications of the new identity that Christians have and are to understand. As Israel was God’s chosen people, believers are a chosen race. We are also a royal priesthood, belonging both to the family of the King and to the priestly family. We are a holy nation, a people for His possession, as Israel had been. Our purpose as the people of God and as priests is to proclaim the praises of God. Here we learn the nature of the spiritual sacrifices of this new priesthood—praising God. Hebrews 13:15 refers to “a sacrifice of praise.” Romans 12:1 speaks of the spiritual worship of offering our “bodies as a living sacrifice” to God. Although Peter did not name the sacrifice of our bodies here, the entire passage implies it. Such a sacrifice of praise is merited by the nature of what God has done for us in Christ. He has called us out of the darkness of our world into His marvelous light in Christ.

2:10. Peter then applied Hosea 2:23 to these largely Gentile congregations. Once they did not belong to God’s people Israel, but then they became part of God’s people, the church. Formerly they knew nothing of God’s mercy to Israel, but then they received mercy through the Lord Jesus Christ. Many believers have a faulty sense of identity as Christians. They may see themselves only as church members or as possessing a certainty of a home in heaven. Such believers can find their lives transformed by understanding they are part of something far greater than themselves. They belong to the new people of God. God now lives in them. They are priests serving before God, offering up the sacrifice of praise to Him amid a perverted and lost world.