



Scriptures and Doctrine :: The Universal Priesthood of All Believers

The Universal Priesthood of All Believers - posted by KingJimmy (), on: 2005/7/25 20:29

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;

(1 Peter 2:9)

Historically speaking, this verse became one of the main rallying cries of the Protestant Reformation. Long deceived by the Roman Catholic Church, the reformers gained a piercing insight into what would become known as the doctrine of the universal priesthood of all believers, which would cause a major rift between them and the Establishment. The Catholic Church insisted that only those who were properly ordained as priests had access to God. Therefore, salvation could only be obtained through the official mediators of mankind- the priests. And the means the priesthood offered mankind's salvation was through the sacraments. Firmly establishing themselves as the way of salvation for mankind, the Roman Catholic Church declared that there was no salvation possible outside of her institution, as the priests alone had authority to perform baptism, serve communion, and forgive sins.

The reformers begged to differ. Instead, the reformers saw in this verse the declaration that all believers, not just those properly ordained, had access to God. They deeply believed the cry of Hebrews 4:16, that by faith all men could boldly approach the throne of grace, and have equal access to God. Instead of having to find a go-between in a priest, the reformers dared to believe that they needed no mediator to have access to God, save the Lord Jesus Christ. Instead, the reformers dared to believe that all believers served God as a royal priesthood, with Jesus Christ being the High Priest (Hebrews 3:1).

As great as this doctrinal advance was, that all mankind by faith had personal access to God, and could boldly approach His throne to find mercy, it is my growing conviction that the reformers did not go far enough. In their recovery of this doctrine of the universal priesthood of all believers, I believe they were still only looking at one side of the coin. When many in the reformation broke away from the Roman Catholic Church espousing this doctrine, they still maintained the old way of doing church.

When many broke away, such as with Martin Luther, they still maintained a priesthood of sorts. Yes, they believed with all their hearts that all men had personal access to God through faith. But, they still carried the Roman Catholic doctrine that only certain men, priests, pastors, the ordained clergy, etc., had the right to perform baptism, serve communion, and stand up to expound on the Scriptures, and so forth. Indeed, this way of doing church crept into the reformation, and subsequently, into most Churches since then. Lutherans, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, Methodists, Baptists, Pentecostals, etc., have likewise embraced this hand-me-down doctrine from Rome.

Such though, has no Biblical basis to it whatsoever. If the doctrine of the universal priesthood of all believers is to be fully recovered, it must not stop at the belief that all believers have access to God. Instead, to view the other side of the coin, it must embrace the conviction that not only do all believers have the right to have access to God without a mediator, but that all believers as priests unto God also have the right to serve each other! If we fully embrace the doctrine of the universal priesthood of believers, the days where only one or a small group of officially approved men stand up in Church service to perform baptism, serve communion, and expound on the Scriptures must entirely vanish.

For when we look at the example of the Levitical priesthood in the Old Testament, we see that not only did the priests serve the Lord in the temple ceremonies, but that they also served their fellow Israelites. They not only ministered unto the Lord, but they also ministered unto each other! With this picture in mind, does the apostle Peter understand that all believers form a priesthood.

Therefore, all believers have the right as priests of God to baptize, serve communion, but also minister the word of the Lord. If we fully embrace this doctrine, gone are the days where you enter into the ever-so predictable Church service where usually the order of service goes something along the lines of: Greeting -> Opening Prayer -> Singing -> Offering ->

Sermon -> Altar Call -> Closing Prayer. Instead of a service being dominated by simply a handful of people at best, in an ever so predictable fashion, services would begin to look like this:

“When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation...”

(1 Corinthians 12:26)

In the early Church, because it was taught that all believers were priests, when the doctrine of the universal priesthood of believers was put into practice, it was the common experience that in any given assembly, every single believer present may have something to potentially contribute to the service. Every believer present might potentially stand up and say something for an unspecified duration of time. One might prophesy, another might speak in tongues and another interpret, another may stand up and sing, another stand up and teach, another stand up and simply testify, and so forth.

Such is seriously lacking in the Church today. Instead, we are still doing things the way the Roman Catholics do it, where one man called “the pastor,” or “the preacher” dominates the service, and everything centers around them. Because of this, spiritually speaking, many believers remain spiritual infants all their lives. Their growth forever remains stunted because they never learn the fact that they too are priests, not only unto God but in service unto man.

This is easily manifest in the typical Sunday morning service. God forbid the pastor get sick, go on vacation, or go as a guest speaker somewhere else. For if he does, you can be sure if the people get wind of it, there will be an extremely low attendance that morning. Why? Because the Church has become dependent upon one man to go up the mountain side and hear from God, then come back down and speak what thus says the Lord. If that man they have become accustomed to hearing from for what thus says the Lord should not be there to perform, out of familiarity, they don’t like to go see his less admired substitute. Thus, many pastors avoid even making an announcement that they will be going out of town for a duration of time out of fear people might not show up in their absence altogether!

If such is the case in your Church, where the numbers drop off dramatically because of the absence of one person, then be sure that your Church is not where they should be in their spiritual development.

There is only One person a Church should be centered around, and that is Jesus Christ. If the Church is centered around one extremely charismatic leader and cannot survive without their presence there, be sure that Church is not centered around Christ.

Take for example at Central Church of God in Charlotte, North Carolina. In the past year or so, Pastor Loran Livingston, considered by many to be the top preacher in the Church of God (Cleveland, TN), and is the official voice of his denomination, suffered a major sickness that required him to step outside of the pulpit for several months. Central Church of God easily packs in several thousand people into any given service. However, it is interesting to see that when Loran Livingston fell ill, and was unable to preach, that nobody in this massive congregation was considered an able enough preacher to take over his pulpit for the duration of his illness. In order to maintain numbers within that Church, another highly recognized preacher within that denomination was put there in his place until he gained enough strength to preach again.

For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst.

(Matthew 18:20)

Jesus Christ desires a Church that is centered around only One man, and that is Himself. A Church that is centered around Christ, while they might miss the presence of a beloved and highly respected member should they not attend one service, ought to not scatter and be found missing themselves should he fail to attend.

In a Christ centered Church, where believers come together understanding that they are all priests of God, they should come with two expectations. The first expectation that they should come with is that when the saints assemble, that they are going to encounter the presence of Christ. For Christ promised where two or three gathered together in His name, He would be there in the midst of them. The second expectation that they should come to the assembly with is because Christ is present in their midst, that He will not simply be present in some atmospheric, ghostly sort of way, but that Christ will manifest His presence in their midst through each of them.

When this is understood, the saint comes to the assembly not only with the expectation of receiving a blessing from the Lord, but they will also come with the expectation of being a blessing to somebody else! So many come to our assemblies expecting to receive a blessing, but how many come with the sense that they might become a blessing? How many come expecting to stand up and testify of what the Lord has done in their lives? How many come expecting to stand up and prophesy? How many come expecting to stand up and teach?

I bet very few. I bet most don't even pray that when they assemble with the saints this Sunday, that they might stand up and minister as a priest of God unto the people. Yet it should not be this way. Oh, they might pray for a couple hours during the week if they know they are being asked to stand in the pastor's absence to preach. But, because we don't come to the assembly of the saints prayed up and expecting to being a conduit of blessing to others, and don't open ourselves to the working of the Holy Spirit, it should not be a surprise at all that we don't end up being a blessing to anybody at all.

It is my hearts cry that all believers realize this doctrine of the universal priesthood of believers. Oh to God that we would realize this doctrine, and be the priests God has called all of us to be! I would encourage you this Sunday when you gather with the saints, not to come to Church simply as some passive receiver, but that you would come to your assembly expecting to be used by God as a blessing to the rest of the saints.

If you are by gifting a teacher, earnestly seek the face of God that He would give you something to teach. If you are a prophet, earnestly seek the face of God that He would give you a prophetic utterance that you might proclaim to the saints. If you have the gift of tongues, earnestly seek the face of God that you might give utterance and that an accompanying interpretation would be brought forward.

If we would all do this, even if all the pastors in the local assembly might be altogether absent this Sunday, our numbers should not drop in the slightest save for their absence. We should come with the same expectation that regardless of who is there, Jesus Christ will be there.

Re: The Universal Priesthood of All Believers - posted by KingJimmy (), on: 2005/7/26 12:40

I was talking to my cousin recently who told me she knows of a church where she lives that is currently crippled because it's pastor resigned, and now they are on a major pastor hunt. I believe if we were truly walking in the universal priesthood of believers, such things would not happen where entire congregations become crippled until they find a replacement pastor. While the blessing a certain man of God might bring upon a congregation will surely be missed should they move on elsewhere, the local church should not cease to function or forever change how it operates. Instead, things should continue on, since Christ is in charge, and all believers are His priests, able to serve each other and reach out to a lost and dying world.

Re: - posted by philologos (), on: 2005/7/26 12:58

Jimmy

this is a great theme. With my usual pedantry I prefer 'the potential priesthood of all the regenerate' :-D but these are certainly important truths that easily become lost in the fascination with 'ministries'.

Re: - posted by jeremyhulsey (), on: 2005/7/26 14:15

Excellent post Jimmy. I'm printing this up and sending it to some friends to read.

Re: - posted by KingJimmy (), on: 2005/7/26 15:04

Glad you guys enjoy :)

Re: The church as is: the refining fire - posted by roadsign (), on: 2005/7/26 16:35

Quote:

-----it is my growing conviction that the reformers did not go far enough.

I don't think there really was a revival/awakening. No doubt some reformers were truly born from above (the Spirit), but the majority still looked for a worship practise that was locked in place and form - the Old Covenant - with all the y

mbolic trappings and laws, but without the real thing — the Spirit. Scripture does not lie when it says, “No one seeks God”

Quote:
-----Their growth forever remains stunted because they never learn the fact that they too are priests, not only unto God but in service unto man.

I also add:

Quote:
-----'the potential priesthood of all the regenerate'

because one cannot be a priest without the Spirit of Christ living and working within.

Quote:
-----I believe if we were truly walking in the universal priesthood of believers, such things would not happen where entire congregations become crippled until they find a replacement pastor.

I agree. I'd say they were crippled all along, - weak, worldly, never having grown up into spiritual maturity. The absence of a pastor only reveals what is already true — people want religion more than they want God. They trust in a pastor to keep them on track. They desire to follow God by proxy while holding on to worldly affections.

I suspect that those who truly hunger for God will grow BECAUSE of the Church's perpetual tendency to quench the Spirit and permit growth. The resistance is like refining fire. It is truly costly to follow Christ. The entire religious system cannot receive it. You can't put new wine into old wine skins.

Troublesome times in church are great opportunities for the members to get into their own Bibles, and seek the Lord.

I believe that the giftings and workings of the Spirit occur throughout life, and are not confined to an organized religious activity.

Isn't this forum to some extent the Church at work - maybe more, because there is much more chance to interact than there is in a church service or at a potluck.

I think there is much more yet, that we haven't seen.

Re: - posted by denem7 (), on: 2005/7/26 19:04

what a great post! how sad it is that so many people have "pastoral zeal" but not "Christ zeal". the pastor (at my sister's church) resigned to follow God in some other direction (about 2 years ago). after the pastor left, about half the congregation left to go to another church. {don't the "statistics" say that most of church growth is attributed to transfer rather than reaching the unchurched???}. anyway, since the church was a 500-member++ church, they had to have a doctor of theology for their new pastor. they searched for an additional year while the church began "circling the drain". they finally found a pastor a month ago. i suppose he had the correct "trophy" on his resume. why does the church search for new pastors based on college degrees rather than the amount of Holy Spirit within an individual? the church often uses the same approach in recruiting new staff members as the world does. they look at the EXTERNAL rather than the INTERNAL.

everyone, don't get mad at me because i believe there IS value in education. but, as i mentioned earlier, it shouldn't be the sole qualification for choosing a new staff member.

Re: priesthood of believers - posted by moreofHim (), on: 2005/7/26 19:53

Jimmy,

you have been cranking out some awesome posts lately. This is excellent.

Quote:
-----it is my growing conviction that the reformers did not go far enough.

So true! It seems to be a slow process down through the ages. Who will be the next reformers?! :-)

Quote:
-----If you are by gifting a teacher, earnestly seek the face of God that He would give you something to teach. If you are a prophet, earnestly seek the face of God that He would give you a prophetic utterance that you might proclaim to the saints. If you have the gift of tongues, earnestly seek the face of God that you might give utterance and that an accompanying interpretation would be brought forward.

Wow! How refreshing.

In Him, Chanin

Re: - posted by philologos (), on: 2005/7/27 9:46

I wonder whether it might be profitable now to ask what is the function of such a New Covenant priest?

Re: - posted by philologos (), on: 2005/7/27 13:42

The Levitical priesthood is first mentioned in Ex 28 after the instructions for the creation of the Tabernacle. There is a pattern here. The Covenant agreement is followed by God's declaration that He want to live among His people. Ex. 25:8 And let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them. The first thing I notice here is that the purpose of the Tabernacle was to be a home for God rather than a preaching centre or evangelistic outreach point. The Holy God must have a Holy Place (sanctuary) in order to dwell 'among' His people.

It has been said that the Tabernacle speaks of 'distance' from God and in a sense it does, but it speaks about 'distance' from the God who is near. This is spiritual distance not measured in miles.

The Levitical priests' first responsibility was to 'service' the Tabernacle; God's home. God's word to Moses was that Aaron and his sons were to 'taken.. from among the children of Israel, that he may minister unto me..as a priest.' The first orientation of the Levitical priest was 'Godwards'. They would have other responsibilities but their priority was availability to God.

The Levitical priesthood can serve us with an instructive truth here. Those priests were Godwards in their orientation. Here is an example of New Covenant priests in action; "Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them." (Acts 13:1-2, KJVS) The phrase 'ministered to' is the translation of the word 'leitourgeo'.

The related word 'ministry' is used in Luke 1:23 And it came to pass, that, as soon as the days of his ministration were accomplished, he departed to his own house.
Heb. 8:6 But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises.
Heb. 9:21 Moreover he sprinkled with blood both the tabernacle, and all the vessels of the ministry. In each of these instances the atmosphere is 'priestly' but the New Covenant 'priests' were not going through 'liturgies'. 'leitourgeo' was originally public service at your own expense, but we find the whole church 'ministering' in the New Covenant. The New Covenant community is seen 'ministering' in one or two other places; Phil. 2:17 Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all.
Phil. 2:30 Because for the work of Christ he was nigh unto death, not regarding his life, to supply your lack of service toward me.
2Cor. 9:12 For the administration of this service not only supplieth the want of the saints, but is abundant also by many thanksgivings unto God; In these last 3 instances it is plain that the 'priestly' involved the whole church.

The key thing to my mind is that the prime sense is of 'serving God'. Psa. 134:1 Behold, bless ye the LORD, all ye servants of the LORD, which by night stand in the house of the LORD. If the priests were in the house of the LORD at night, they were not offering sacrifices but 'waiting on God'?

Just some thoughts to broaden the thread...

Re:, on: 2005/7/27 17:17

Quote: "In the early Church, because it was taught that all believers were priests, when the doctrine of the universal priesthood of believers was put into practice, it was the common experience that in any given assembly, every single believer present may have something to potentially contribute to the service. Every believer present might potentially stand up and say something for an unspecified duration of time. One might prophesy, another might speak in tongues and another interpret, another may stand up and sing, another stand up and teach, another stand up and simply testify, and so forth."

This is the basis of the Religious Society of Friends, established by George Fox in England in 1660. The people are the Tabernacle. And the primary belief is that there is that of God in Every person. We are called to Wait Upon the Lord in our unprogrammed meetings for worship and there is no minister or priest to run things.

This leads to some unconventional testimonies as well as profound insights on the Love of God for all people.

Sadly, the Society has broken up into programmed and unprogrammed meetings, with the programmed meetings having ministers and all the elements of conventional protestant worship services. There is little or no time in these services for waiting upon the Lord. Nor is there opportunity for anyone to testify.

Anyone with an interest in learning more should check out <http://www.quaker.org/>

Bubbaguy

Re: - posted by KingJimmy (), on: 2005/7/28 18:13

Quote:

I don't think there really was a revival/awakening. No doubt some reformers were truly born from above (the Spirit), but the majority still looked for a worship practise that was locked in place and form

Hard to say, I've not personally read a lot of on the reformers. I know the survey of history I've had on the reformation, there is some concern from historians that perhaps some of what took place was a lot more intellectual than spiritual. The biggest concern voiced by some seems to come from the lack of missionary activity during the reformation. It wasn't usually for another 100-200 years before there seemed to be a revival of missions, beginning with the Moravians.

Quote:

The absence of a pastor only reveals what is already true - people want religion more than they want God.

Indeed. But I think also because it is so ingrained into people that one cannot phathom having a church without a pastor. Even the heathen understand that is how church typically functions, even one's who have never stepped in side a church in their entire life.

Quote:

I suspect that those who truly hunger for God will grow BECAUSE of the Church's perpetual tendency to quench the Spirit and permit growth. The resistance is like refining fire. It is truly costly to follow Christ. The entire religious system cannot receive it. You can't put new wine into old wine skins.

I think such has been my personal experience. Such has caused me to further seek out what saith the Scriptures. I was never brought up in the church, and even after I got saved I remained mostly outside of it. I constantly saw that what I was reading in the Scriptures was not being lived out in the Churches I attended, which caused me to look all the deeper i

nto the Scriptures to see what God would have the Church be.

Re: - posted by KingJimmy (), on: 2005/7/28 18:15

Quote:

why does the church search for new pastors based on college degrees rather than the amount of Holy Spirit within an individual?

My question is why do Churches look to replace pastors as it is? There are many Churches in the book of Acts that had no pastors for quite some time. Why not simply continue being the Church until God should raise up qualified men within the congregation to be pastors?

Re: - posted by KingJimmy (), on: 2005/7/28 18:23

Good post Ron. I was recently teaching on this very thing a couple weeks ago in my Singles & College class at church. One must first as a priest minister unto the Lord. Such is the primary description of the priestly function within the Old Testament. God tells Moses several times in Exodus to anoint Aaron and his sons so that they "might minister as priests unto Me." Of course, there are a few verses that talk about the priests ministry unto the people, but these are much fewer than the ones that speak of ministering unto God.

I like to use Samuel's example, where he was constantly in the temple ministering unto the Lord. Because Samuel chose to make this his primary ministry did God see fit to give Samuel visions in days when visions were rare. Because he chose to minister unto the Lord, all Israel knew Samuel was confirmed as a prophet, and the Lord did not let any of his words fail. I believe if we had to choose between being a priest unto God or a prophet unto the people, we should choose to minister unto the Lord.

I also like Job's example, how he would raise every time his children completed the cycle of their festivals, and intercede on their behalf, raising early to offer sacrifice, just in case, perhaps, they had a wicked thought against the Lord.

Our ministry as intercessors is perhaps the most important of all. It's a scary thing that in this world, there are some people who have nobody whatsoever to pray for them. Countless billions are walking around, without one soul remembering them before God.

Help us Lord!