

Practicing the Priesthood of Believers in Assembly Gatherings

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We endeavor to faithfully apply the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers in our assembly gatherings. We consider the doctrine of the priesthood of believers as one of the distinctives of our faith and practice. Our “open” worship and remembrance meeting, the freedom in ministry, and the liberty to exercise one’s spiritual gifts are indeed a splendid demonstration of the grandeur of this precious truth. We have a greater claim to this doctrine than any other Christian group.

I believe it is high time that we ponder over this doctrine Scripturally and practically and be willing to fine-tune its application for the glory of God and for the blessing of His people. We may need more study and discussion of this truth in our assemblies so that we can weed out the thorns and plant the good Scriptural seeds that will become fruitful in the coming days. This vital doctrine can be under-used, misused or even abused, as a result of ignorance, lack of clear understanding, or selfishness. Many believers know this doctrine only in terms of its *privileges* without any regard to its *responsibilities*.

Does this doctrine mean each one of us can interpret Scripture in any way we like, without any regard to sound hermeneutical principles? Does this mean that one can obstinately push his ideas or opinions with little regard to the needs of others or the well-being of the assembly? Does this doctrine sanction carelessness, irreverence, casualness, irresponsible freedom of speech, lack of sensitivity to the opportunity of others in our worship meeting? In the name of the priesthood of all believers, can we disregard the unique place and contribution of equipping leaders in the church (Eph.4:11-12) and take a very casual attitude towards local assembly leadership? Have we wrongly interpreted the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers as the “preacherhood of all believers” so that everyone can preach or teach the way they like without any regard to the edification of the assembly? These are vital issues that need to be addressed by every local assembly. The Lord should not find us guilty of the malpractice of a precious truth.

Priesthood & Spiritual Gifts

I believe part of the problem may be the failure to distinguish between priesthood and spiritual gifts. *Equality in priesthood does not imply equality in spiritual gifts.* In the enumeration of spiritual gifts in the New Testament (Rom.12, 1Cor.12, Eph.4, 1Pet.4) priesthood is not mentioned. Priesthood is a privileged position or office of a believer, while spiritual gift is a divine enablement for spiritual service. The gifts never carry the idea of priesthood. All believers are priests and all believers are given spiritual gifts, but not all have the same gifts; the gifts differ. All believers share alike and equally their position as a priest. But the gift for service differs among Christians. The purpose of the priesthood is to offer spiritual sacrifices, while the purpose of spiritual gifts is to edify the body of Christ. This is a very vital truth that needs to be clearly comprehended in proper perspective and carefully implemented in our gatherings.

The idea of the priesthood of believers is one of the most precious and powerful images of Scripture. We may be tempted to trivialize sacred services in the church of God, if we do not properly understand and apply this doctrine. Some of us in the assemblies may have a false notion that since we believe in the priesthood of believers, we all can or should preach and teach. There are assemblies where all men take their turns in ministering the Word. Sometimes we proudly say, "We don't have a "one-man" pastor, "anybody" can speak in our meeting." We fail to make the distinction between priesthood and the ministry of the Word which is to be done **by gifted men** in the assembly for the edification of **all** when the whole assembly gathers (1 Cor.14: 4, 5, 12, 26, 40). The gifted men also should be empowered by the Holy Spirit. There should be spiritual power for the fruitful exercise of the spiritual gifts. Other less formal occasions may be utilized to encourage and train others in the sharing and communication of the Word. We should not despise the spiritual contribution which everyone can make. But that should not be the norm for the ministry of the Word.

Sometimes we tend to generously open our pulpit too wide to accommodate any and everyone without due consideration of their utterance gifts; all in the name of the doctrine of the priesthood of believers. When we do this, we are doing a disservice to the people of God. It is high time that we "fence" our pulpit with Scriptural guidelines. Ministry of the word should be by *different* men, but at the same time by *gifted* men. Ministry of the Word is the truth of God which comes from God to man, expounded doctrinally and practically by gifted men in the assembly in the power of the Holy Spirit for the edification of the body of Christ. Our freedom in this area should be exercised with responsibility and accountability.

Priesthood & Worship

Ministry and *worship* are different. They are precisely opposite. **Worship** is from men to God and **ministry** (service) is toward one another. We all have the privilege and responsibility in worshipping God; in praise, thanksgiving, adoration, and prayers. It is sad that many of us fail to exercise our priestly privileges at the Lord's Supper/Worship meeting. This is our priestly birthright. This is where our priestly responsibility must be exercised most. In many assemblies, only a small number of men are willing to participate in the Remembrance meeting from week to week and often the same men every week! Many young men remain silent during the Lord's Supper meeting though they may be very active in other areas of ministry.

Prior preparation will definitely help us in a meaningful participation in the Lord's Supper. There is always a possibility that some new and young believers may not realize the importance of prior preparation. This needs to be taught and reminded periodically. Periods of silence may be a good opportunity for individual silent meditation and worship. But silence also can be indicative of lack

of preparation and spiritual urge. The Breaking of Bread Meeting is the most cherished meeting of the Brethren Assemblies. Let us all commit ourselves to rediscover the power, grandeur and blessing of real worship. This is one of the most important occasions for a practical demonstration of the priesthood of believers. The real appreciation and application of this vital doctrine will definitely take away the “dryness” from our remembrance meeting.

Let us uphold the glorious doctrine of the priesthood of believers and practice it in integrity. Let us not trivialize its meaning with individualism and wrong practices, and traditions. Since this doctrine is the barometer of our life together in the body of Christ and our testimony in the world, we need more in-depth teaching of it in the assemblies.