

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

Scripture: 1 Peter 2:5b

Code: 60-18

Let's open our Bibles then again tonight to our study of spiritual privilege...spiritual privilege. And we're looking at 1 Peter chapter 2 verses 4 through 10. I told you last week it was going to take a little while to get through this, I reiterate that again because of the greatness of the text, because of the sweeping breadth of what it contains, because of the richness of each individual element in this passage, it's going to take us a little while to take our way through this. We don't want to lose anything in the process so we'll be as careful as we can moving slow enough to absorb those main ideas that the Spirit of God has conveyed to us in this text.

Now beginning in verse 4 the Apostle Peter outlines the great spiritual privileges that belong to the children of God. He has been talking about duties. He has been talking about obligations. And now he shifts gears and he talks about privileges.

In thinking about that I suppose that...oh, it might be fair to say that most of us as Christians probably look at our Christian life more from the viewpoint of duty than we do the viewpoint of privilege. That wouldn't be too far afield for most of us. We assume, I suppose, that while you're in this world, duty reigns supreme. And some day when we get to heaven, then privilege will take over. We seem to be honest enough to say to ourselves, "I feel more the pressure of my spiritual duty than I do the joy of my spiritual privilege." And it is true that most of us think of life here as duty and life in heaven as privilege. In heaven we're going to have perfect peace, perfect harmony, perfect unity. We'll see the Lord Jesus Christ. We'll be in the presence of God. We will have perfect joy, perfect rest, perfect knowledge, perfect wisdom, perfect blessing. In heaven we will receive the reward of our service to Christ. We will have the fellowship of all the redeemed saints of all the ages. We will be in the presence of holy angels. We will walk on golden streets and enter through gates made of a pearl. We will have a jeweled city as the capital of our eternal abode. There will be freedom from sickness and sin and pain and death. And heaven is all privilege and no duty.

But that's not quite true. While heaven will be great and glorious privilege, there will also be duty there as we worship and honor and exalt God. And on the other hand, while this life is mostly duty from the standpoint of struggling against our flesh and endeavoring to live a godly life, it is also true that we enjoy immense privilege. And so both in this life and the life to come, we must understand spiritual duty and spiritual privilege. We're looking then at what we might consider the best of the two, namely our spiritual privileges.

Now, go back to verse 4 with me just so we kind of get warmed up and get a running start into the text, all right? Remember now as we said last time that first phrase "and coming to Him," ought to be outlined. That notes our salvation onward. We came to Christ for salvation. And it was in that coming to Him that all our spiritual privileges were born. It's out of coming to Christ that all the good things become ours. We came to Him as to a living stone. And by the way, the living stone is a Messianic concept. The term "stone" used in the Old Testament to refer to the coming Messiah, but this stone is a living one and that notes His resurrection. He is a living stone, the cornerstone in the Kingdom that the Lord is building. And so we come to Him who is the Messiah, the living stone, the cornerstone in the great spiritual Kingdom that God is building.

Notice Peter said He was rejected by men. Men, you remember, we said last time were the selfappointed, selfproud, selfindulgent and selfconvinced assessors of Christ and His worth. And they ascertained after close examination that Jesus was an unworthy stone and they crucified Him. He was unfit to be the cornerstone of the religious house which they assumed that God would want to build. And so Christ was rejected by men, continues to be rejected by men and yet it says in verse 4 He was chosen and precious in the sight of God.

So, God has chosen Christ. God has identified Him as the precious stone to which every believer coming is then introduced into great and vast spiritual privilege. We are the blessed of the world. We have entered into spiritual privilege.

Now we kind of used a kaleidoscope as our form of conveying the concepts here. It's as if Peter takes these beautiful stones regarding Christ and believers as living stones and rotates the little kaleidoscope to put those stones in a different order, all of which demonstrate different beauty and wonder in the imagery of what it means to possess spiritual privilege.

First of all, and we noted this last time, let me just briefly review it, the first spiritual privilege we noted is union with our Lord...union with our Lord. Verse 5, "You also as living stones are being built up as a spiritual house." Now the union is noted two ways. He is a living stone, we are living stones, therefore we possess the same nature, the same character, the same quality of existence, the same kind of life as Christ. We are one with Him in terms of the essence of our being.

Secondly, we are being built up as a spiritual house. And we noted that Christ is the cornerstone and believers become the stones that move up from there to build the spiritual house which Paul says becomes the habitation of the Spirit. So our union with Christ is both because we are living stones as He is a living stone and because as the very house, the very spiritual house of God He dwells in us. So we are in union with our Lord. We are by virtue of character like Him and we are the house in which He lives. And that is why, I remind you, 1 Corinthians 6 makes such a major point out of this when it says in verse 17, "The one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him." And then in

verse 19, "Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you." So we are united with Christ...one in essence, one in life, one in nature, we are partakers of the divine nature, Peter says. And we are the habitation of the Spirit. That's why Paul in Galatians 2:20 says, "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live yet not I but Christ lives in me." That's why he writes to the Colossians, "Christ in you, the hope of glory." Now we know that. But keep it in mind, that is the first great spiritual privilege...union with our Lord, spiritual union with the living Lord Jesus Christ.

The implications of this are incredible, really...tremendous, amazing. He lives through us. He loves through us. He speaks through us. He serves through us. He even worships God through us. His life in us is eternal, undying, forever. His life in us controls us, works all things together for our good, conforms us to Himself. He is in us available for every need, every trial, every possible circumstance of life. What a privilege.

Now let's come to spiritual privilege number two. Not only do we enjoy union with our Lord but I want you to follow this thought out of the Word of God tonight, we enjoy...let's call it admission to our Lord, or if you like, access...admission or access. That is a great privilege. You realize, of course, don't you, that the vast world around us of unredeemed people do not know God. They have no access to God. They are never admitted into His presence. In fact, the Bible says they are afar off. The Bible says they know not God. The Bible says they are unwelcome in His presence. And it is true that in the religions of the world, even the deities that human beings invent are remote, indifferent, apathetic to human problems and men appease them but do not desire to draw near to them. But we as believers have full admission to the presence of our Lord.

This was not even true, by the way, in the Old Testament economy of Israel. While there was a sense in which the Jews could pray to God and could draw into His presence spiritually, they could not go near His presence physically. You remember that when God came down on Mount Sinai He warned the people not to even come near the mountain or even touch the mountain, not to come near the holy place of His presence. You remember, of course, that no one but the high priest one time during the year could ever enter into the Holy of Holies and be admitted to the presence of the Lord God. And yet in the old covenant that which was saved only for the priesthood becomes the opportunity and the privilege of every Christian.

Look at verse 5, he says, "We are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." Now listen as we think through this marvelous thought. First of all he says we are the temple, we are the spiritual house and then he sort of shifts gears in the middle of his metaphor and says not only are you the spiritual house, the temple of God, but you're the priests functioning in the temple. And he goes to another dimension of our spiritual privilege. It's not like it was in the Old Testament. It's not like it was when only a certain order of priests could approach God and only a high priest could actually go into the Holy of Holies once a year. It's not like it was when God was untouchable and men were inadmissible into His presence.

Under the Old Testament economy there were signs everywhere "no admittance...no admittance...no admittance...stay away...stay away." In fact, when the high priest on the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur, went into the Holy of Holies, it was such a sacred event that he had to go through ceremonial washing as well as spiritual confession, he had to offer a sacrifice for his own sin to make sure he was clean and when he went in he had bells on his garment because if he died in there, they would want to know that. And if the bells stopped tinkling, they would know he was struck down by the fiery judgment of God for entering a holy place in an unholy manner. And so it was a frightening event even to be admitted to the presence of God as unusual as it was, only one man once a year.

Beyond the high priest there was only one priesthood, only one priesthood that could offer sacrifices to God. And anybody who stepped into the priesthood and tried to do that without being a true priest was in danger of severe judgment. Uzzah tread on holy things that cost him his life. King Asaiah(?) functioned as a priest feeling proud and very invincible because he had reigned for 52 years in the land of God and he thought he could enter into the priestly function and God gave him leprosy and he died. Saul tried to function like a priest and God cursed his line and said "Out of your loins will no king ever come." Korah and his rebellious cohorts tried to enter into the priestly realm and the ground opened and swallowed all of them up. You see, stepping into the priestly arena without having been ordained of God to that office meant you put your life in severe jeopardy.

But, in the new covenant, in the New Testament we are a holy priesthood, all of us. In fact, notice down in verse 9, we'll get to this later, we are a royal priesthood, a royal priesthood, a holy priesthood. We are separated and given admission to God, access into His presence.

Now, never having been involved in Judaism, ancient Judaism which, of course, does not exist anymore, we don't really understand the elements of priesthood that become ours. And so in a very real sense we are all the poorer because here we are saying, "Oh yes, we're holy priests," and somebody says, "What does that mean?" "I don't know but isn't it wonderful? Isn't it lovely? We have access to God." But what is a priest and how are we to understand the priesthood? So I spent some time this week basically studying the Old Testament priesthood to show you what it means to be a priest. Now it's true of all of us, we are a holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. The priests of the old covenant had one job really, to offer up acceptable sacrifices to God. And that's what we are called to do, that's what we are privileged to do.

Now in understanding the priesthood we're going to have a little...I think it will be very fascinating for you...a little Old Testament lesson tonight. Three passages I want to use. There are several that could be used, but I want you to mark these down and maybe jump a little bit around with me in and out of them. The first one is Exodus 28 and 29. The second one is Leviticus 8 and 9. And the third one is Malachi 2, or have some have said, that great Italian prophet Malachi (pronounced Malachee), you'll find him in your Bible.

Exodus 28 and 29, Leviticus 8 and 9 and Malachi chapter 2. Now let me tell you the difference between these, all right? In Exodus you have God's commands regarding the priesthood. Exodus 28 and 29, God lays out the standard for the priesthood, identifies the office, defines how it's to function, lays down the principles. Then in Leviticus 8 and 9 the priests are inaugurated into that office. The office is described in Exodus and the men are inaugurated into that office in Leviticus 8 and 9. Malachi 2 is much later in terms of history but it compares an apostate priesthood at the time of Malachi with a true priest as constituted in the early years of the priesthood. So Exodus is important for its definition of the priesthood. Leviticus is important for its inauguration of that priesthood. And Malachi is important for its contrast between an apostate priesthood and the legitimate and Godordained priesthood.

In putting those three passages together I came up with ten characteristics of an Old Testament priest, all right? And you want to listen and you want to understand them because they list for you your spiritual privilege as a priest. They parallel the nature and the features of the believer's priesthood.

Number one principle, number one, the priests were chosen by God. The priests were chosen by God. Let's go now back to Exodus chapter 28...Exodus chapter 28. God speaks in verse 1 of this great and significant chapter. God is outlining all of the details of the priesthood and notice verse 1. God says, "Then bring near to yourself Aaron your brother...God speaking to Moses...and his sons with him, from among the sons of Israel to minister as priests to me. Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar Aaron's sons." Would you please note that nobody volunteered for the priesthood? Would you notice that? Would you notice that there weren't any applications to be filled out and filed with Moses for him to select from? Would you notice that nobody voted on who the priests would be? Would you notice that no spiritual aptitude test was given? No intellectual aptitude test was given? God sovereignly chose Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar and out of their loins was to come the priesthood chosen by God.

Then the first characteristic of the priesthood, it is an elect privilege...it is an elect privilege. And so it is, beloved, with our priesthood, isn't it? Didn't Jesus say to the disciples in John 15:16, "You have not chosen Me, but...what?...I have chosen you"? We are chosen, we are the elect of God chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world. Chosen...elect. And if you are a priest today it is because you are a Christian. And if you are a Christian it is because you are chosen before the foundation of the world to belong to God.

Now another note that fits right here that's really very very enriching. Let me tell you a little bit about Aaron, okay? Let me tell you that Aaron was a part of the tribe of Levi. Okay? And so were all of his sons. The tribe of Levi was then the tribe chosen to be the priests. And out of the tribe of Levi, the sons of Aaron. There were other people from the tribe of Levi, they were the Levites who helped the

priests. But through the loins of the Levite Aaron came the priesthood. Now you need to understand something about the tribe of Levi just to kind of help you a little bit. Genesis 49 verse 5. listen to this, Simeon and Levi are brothers. Their swords are implements of violence. Levi was violent. "Let not my soul enter into their counsel, let not my glory be united with their assembly because in their anger they slew men and in their selfwill they lamed oxen," that is a very severe thing to do when you lame someone's oxen, you basically cut off his ability to plow his field and earn his food and make his living, feed his family. "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."

Nice group, huh? That's Levi. Violent..."Let not my soul enter in to their counsel," says Jacob. There...I don't want to get near them. In their anger they slew men. They lamed oxen. And they're literally cursed, cursed be their anger for its fierce and their wrath for its cruel and I'll disperse them.

Let me say something to you that's very important. Isn't it interesting that when the Lord chose His priests He chose a tribe that was known for its cursedness? He chose a tribe that was known for its violence. He chose a tribe that was known for its sinfulness. Yes, the priests were chosen from the feeble, from the weak, from the sinful. We would not stretch the issue at all to say that Levi was one of the least respected tribes having been cursed, one of the least respected tribes. And the descendants of Levi lived under that curse and yet it was that very tribe that God chose to be the priests. Do you think there's a message there? Jesus said, "I am not come to call the righteous but...what?...sinners to repentance."

Hebrews 7:28 says this, "For the law...listen to this, that is the Old Testament law...appoints men as high priests who are weak." That's a confirmation...that's a confirmation. What a very encouraging reality. They were chosen by God but they were weak, cursed, sinners. And may I suggest to you that God is still choosing the same kind of people? Isn't it wonderful that we who are the weak and we who are the cursed and we who are the sinful have been chosen to be the priests of the Most High God? Do you remember these words? First Corinthians 1:26, "Consider your calling...that means your call to salvation, your election...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, God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong and the base or common 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 chose the people who couldn't boast the weak, the common, the ignoble, the sinful, the cursed. Yes, He is still choosing His priests from among the lowly, even as He chose Aaron a son of Levi.

The first characteristic of the priesthood, the priests are chosen by God. Secondly, the priests are cleansed of sin...the priests are cleansed of sin. Before embarking on their priestly duties there was a cleansing. Let's go to Leviticus chapter 8, the second of our passages to which we draw your attention. And in Leviticus chapter 8 I just want to take you kind of through this because it's so

wonderful. Remember now what I told you, this is the inauguration time when the principles laid down in Exodus are applied as the priests are set in office. And Leviticus chapter 8 verse 6, "Moses had Aaron and his sons come near, washed them with water." Now that's the first indication that there must be a cleansing. That is an outward symbol of an inward need. They were washed with water. "He put the tunic on him, girded him with a sash, clothed him with the robe, put the ephod on him...that is on Aaron, he gave him the high priestly garments as had been prescribed in Exodus...girded him with the artistic band of the ephod of which he tied it to him, placed the breast piece on him and in the breast piece he put the Urim and the Thummim," which was something in that breastplate, we don't know exactly what it was, by which God could reveal His will. He also placed a turban on his head and on the turban at its front he placed the golden plate, a holy crown, just as the Lord had commanded Moses.

"Moses then took the anointing oil, anointed the tabernacle, all that was in it, consecrated them, sprinkled some of it on the altar seven times, anointed the altar, all its utensils and the basin and its stand to consecrate them. Poured some of the anointing oil on Aaron's head and anointed him to consecrate him. Next, Moses had Aaron's sons come near, clothed them with tunics, girded them with sashes, bound caps on them just as the Lord had commanded Moses back in Exodus. 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, took the blood and with his finger put some of it around on the horns of the altar and purified the altar. Then he poured out the rest of the blood at the base of the altar, consecrated it to make atonement for it." This is an atonement for the sins of Aaron and his sons, they have to be cleansed, washed with water, anointed with oil and now atoned for by blood.

"He took all the fat that was on the entrails and the lobe of the liver and the two kidneys and their fat and Moses offered it up in smoke on the altar but the bull, and its hide and its flesh and its refuse he burned in the fire outside the camp just as the Lord had commanded Moses." That is the character of the sin of offering.

Then verse 18, "He presented the ram of the burnt offering and Aaron and his sons laid their hands on the head of the ram and Moses slaughtered it and sprinkled the blood around the altar. And when he had cut the ram into its pieces, Moses offered up the head and the pieces and the suet in smoke. After he had washed the entrails and the legs with water, Moses offered up the whole ram in smoke on the altar. It was a burnt offering for a soothing aroma, it was an offering by fire to the Lord just as the Lord had commanded Moses." And that's the burnt offering. Again, relating to cleansing from sin.

"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, took some of its blood, 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," this is getting pretty technical now. "And he had Aaron's sons come near. Moses put some of the blood on the lobe of the right ear, on the thumb of the right hand, on the big toe of their right foot, Moses then sprinkled the

rest of the blood around on the altar. Took the fat and the fat tail and all of 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 unleaven bread that was before the Lord he took one unleaven cake and one cake of bread mixed with oil and one wafer, placed them on the portions of fat. And on the right thigh put all these things in the hands...on the hands of Aaron, on the hands of his son, presented them as a wave or a consecration offering before the Lord. And Moses took them from their hands, 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 also took the breast, presented it for a wave offering before the Lord, it was Moses' portion of the ram of ordination just as the Lord had commanded Moses."

So, "Moses took some of the anointing oil, some of the blood that was on the altar, sprinkled it on Aaron, on his garments, on his sons, on the garments of his sons with him and he consecrated Aaron, his garments, his sons and the garments of his sons with him."

That is really an operation, folks. What's that all about? Sin offering, burnt offering, consecration offering, washing, all says the same thing...you can't enter the priesthood until you have been...what?...cleansed, washed, forgiven of sin, total cleansing top to bottom, ear to toe. Why the right ear? To sanctify the ear for the hearing of the Word of God. Why the right thumb? To sanctify the hands for the work of God. Why the right toe? To sanctify the feet for the walk of God...the Word, the work, and the walk.

Cleansing...and you, beloved, could not be called a priest if you had not been cleansed from your sin, right? If you had not been washed. That's why our Lord Jesus says to His disciples in John's gospel chapter 13 and verse 8, He says, "If I do not wash you you have no part with Me, he who has bathed need only to have his feet washed but is completely clean and you are clean," He says. Jesus washed His people.

In fact, Titus chapter 2 gives us such tremendous insight into this. In Titus chapter 2 verse 14 it says that Christ gave Himself for us that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself a people for His own possession. He saved us and purified us. Chapter 3 of Titus, verse 5, "He saved us...how?...by the washing of regeneration." He washed us in the Word. He washed us in His blood. In a sense, He washed us in His Spirit...this text is saying. And you became a priest because you were cleansed.

The third principle related to priesthood, they not only were called for service and cleansed for service, thirdly they were clothed for service...they were clothed for service. This is fascinating. Again back to the Old Testament in Exodus, and we'll move a little rapidly here, in Exodus chapter 28 verse



42 it says the priests had to wear linen breeches to cover their bare flesh and they would reach from the loins to the thighs. They had to wear little shorts to cover their organs. That was an element of their clothing mentioned in Exodus 28.

Now if you go with me to Leviticus we'll see the remainder of the clothing mentioned there. It started with that pair of shorts as an undergarment. And then in Leviticus chapter 8, and by the way, that symbolizes purity, sexual purity. You come to Leviticus chapter 8 and we remember that Aaron and his sons came near. Verse 7 says there was a tunic, there was a belt, there was a robe, there was an ephod and an artistic band that held the ephod. Then there was a breast piece, then there was a turban on the head. And then a golden plate, the holy crown, just as the Lord had commanded Moses.

Now they were given special coverings, special garments. And they all symbolized their unique call, listen to this, to purity and virtue and to identification with God. When you saw the garment of a priest it symbolized purity, virtue and identification with God, as God's representative. They were called then to holiness. They were called to separateness. They were called to look different in order that everyone might know that they belonged to God. There was virtue and holiness manifest in their garments.

In Psalm 132 verse 9 we find the spiritual significance of this. "Let thy priests be clothed with righteousness." Verse 16, "Her priests also I will clothe with salvation." So, beloved, let's take a third step. You're a priest because you were called by God to salvation. You're a priest because you were cleansed by the blood of Christ in the washing of the water of the Word. And you are a priest who has been clothed with righteousness. You have been clothed with the garments of salvation, as Isaiah says, the robe of righteousness, namely the righteousness of Christ which has been given to you, imputed to you. First Corinthians 1:30 says Christ Jesus has become to us righteousness, sanctification. That's another characteristic of a priest. We through Christ have become the righteousness of God in Him.

So, chosen for service, cleansed for service, clothed for service. Fourthly, priests were anointed for service. They were anointed for service. Now I mentioned twice in reading Leviticus 8 and I won't go back, verse 12 and verse 30, you don't need to turn to it. But those verses are good illustrations of the anointing. Verse 12 it says he poured some of the anointing oil on Aaron's head. Verse 30, anointing oil was sprinkled on Aaron, on his garments, on his sons, on the garments of his sons with him and he was set apart as were his sons.

What is this anointing? Well, it's really very simple. It was the identification, listen now, that the power and presence of God would rest on the priests. It symbolized God the Spirit. And is it not true that we in the new covenant who are priests have been anointed with the Holy Spirit? In 1 John we are reminded of this wonderfully. We are those specially gifted with the Spirit. First John 2:20 says, "You

have an anointing from the holy one." And then it says further down in the same chapter that that anointing, verse 27, which you received from Him abides in you. So we have an anointing from the holy one that abides in us, pretty easy to figure out who it is. Who abides in us? The Holy Spirit. Our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit.

Now the priests in the Old Testament weren't like everybody else. They had a special anointing. The power of God rested on them. You say, "Well does the Holy Spirit equate with power?" Yes, Acts 1:8, "You shall receive power after the Holy Spirit is...what?...come upon you." So as priests we have been chosen by God, we have been cleansed by God, we have been clothed by God in righteousness and we have been anointed by God with power by the Holy Spirit's indwelling presence. Set apart for privileged powerful authority. The priests in the old covenant could do what nobody else could do, they could go where nobody else could go, they could act in ways that nobody else could act. Because they had special authority, special privilege, special right, special power and that has been granted to us in the anointing of the Spirit of God.

Number five, the fifth characteristic of the priesthood, they were prepared for their duties...they were prepared for service. Not just empowered or anointed for it, but prepared for it. And I want to draw this from the eighth and the ninth chapter of Leviticus where we see the perfect picture and emblem of the priesthood. Would you notice that after all of this preparation, mark this, all of the choosing and the cleansing and the clothing and the anointing, verse 33 of Leviticus 8 says, "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 you will ordain you through seven days."

Then over into chapter 9 verse 4, "And an ox and a ram for peace offerings, to sacrifice before the Lord and a grain offering mixed with oil, for today the Lord shall appear to you." Down in verse 23, "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, consumed the burnt offering, the portions of fat on the altar. When all the people saw it they shouted and fell on their faces."

Now, what the Word of God is saying to us here is, "Look, everything is in order but before you can actually function as a priest there is a preparation of heart that is necessary." There is a waiting time, a heartpreparation time. And I really believe that those seven days are symbolic of spiritual preparedness, spiritual readiness...readiness of mind and readiness of heart which takes into consideration the seriousness of our priesthood. Do you remember the Apostle Paul, Galatians 1, he says after my conversion and after my calling to preach the gospel to the Gentiles, verse 16, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood, I did not go to Jerusalem to those who were Apostles before me. I went away into...where?...Arabia for three years. Paul had been called, Paul had been cleansed, Paul had been clothed in righteousness. Paul had been anointed with the gift of the Holy Spirit. But he went away for a time of preparation. I believe that priestly analogy fits the preparation

for priestly service in the new covenant as well. There must be a time of heart preparation in which we consider the great privilege and the great responsibility of spiritual service.

And I would even go so far as to say, and I don't want to make a point by an analogy, that when a person makes a profession of faith in Jesus Christ, the Spirit of God usually works a ripening in the heart of that marvelous gift of salvation before there is a readiness for spiritual ministry, a time of preparation wherein one thinks deeply about the spiritual commitment having been made and wherein the Spirit of God readies the heart for priestly service.

Number six...number six, the priests were not only prepared for their duties, they were ordained to obedience...they were ordained to obedience. Beloved, I do want you to turn to Leviticus chapter 10 with me. I want to show you one of the saddest portions of Scripture...heart breaking, absolutely tragic. Talking about going from the high to the low, this is really it. These priests had been called, they had been cleansed, they had been clothed, they had been empowered with authority by an anointing, they had gone through a time of waiting for the preparing of heart and they then came to the moment in which they embarked upon their ministry. The fire of God came down at the end of the seven days, burned up the sacrifices. And at the beginning of chapter 10 they embark on their ministry. Verse 1, "Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took their respective fire pans," which were little metal vessels in which they put coals for the lighting of the sacrificial altar, "and after putting fire in them, they 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."

Can you imagine the shock? The whole assembly is there. They have just been inducted into the priesthood. They are now to work their first priestly act and they do it wrong. And fire burns them to a crisp on the first day of their priestly ministry. Why? Moses said to Aaron who must have been shocked, stunned, "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. So Aaron therefore...what?...kept silent." He wanted to protest. He wanted to cry out, "O God, why have You burned my sons up?" We can't even imagine the shock of a father seeing that, a father who with joy in his heart anticipated the priestly ministry of his children. It would be safe to say that the only thing worse than having your son grow up and not go into the ministry would be having your son grow up and go in to pervert the ministry. And that's what they did. And Moses said, "Look, by those who come near Me...priests that's what he means...the only people who can come near him are priests...by those who come near Me, I will be treated as holy or else." I want that message loud and clear. They are ordained to obedience, that's the message. And God makes it abundantly clear, newly serving priests burned to a crisp.

People always ask, "What was the strange fire?" Well, maybe I can help you to understand a little. I can't be dogmatic, several possibilities. The Hebrew word for strange fire, strange here is zuwr. Now if we look at how that word is used we might get some help. In Psalm 81:9 it is used in reference to a

false god. Could it be that they were using the fire that came from the altar of a false god? It is used in Proverbs 2:16 of an immoral woman. Fire that somehow was immoral in that it didn't come from the sacred place that God had ordained it to come from. The same word *zuwr* is used in Hosea 5:7 of an illegitimate child or illegitimate children. So the point is, it must have been fire that wasn't the way God ordained it. It didn't come from the right place from the right source where God had divinely ordained. And if you go back to Leviticus 16 up to Leviticus 16:12 there's a reiteration of the fact that God had ordained that the brazen altar would be the place to get the fire. The brazen altar, by the way, never went out and the fire would always be burning and they would go there to get the hot coals to light the altar of sacrifice. So it must have been fire from other than the divinely ordained place. It wasn't authentic fire. It was an artificial offering instead of the real.

And also, according to Exodus chapter 30 verses 34 to 38, there is an incredibly clear and precise description of the incense. God gave them a recipe for incense to be used that could never be altered. Perhaps there's a second alternative. Maybe the fire came from the right place but what made it strange was that they had put an incense there that was not the incense God had designed in Exodus 30:34 to 38. It is also possible that they offered it at the wrong time. Exodus chapter 30 verse 7 says the sacrifices were to be made in the morning and in the evening.

One other thought. This was a day of great celebration. Would you notice verse 9? The Lord spoke to Aaron in verse 8, what did He say to him? Poor Aaron...Poor Aaron. Moses says, "Don't uncover your heads, don't rip your clothes," verse 6. We don't want you to die, Aaron was so sad he wanted to die. Poor guy, terrible event, terrible. "Don't leave this place or you might die," Moses says. And then the Lord says to Aaron this, "Do not drink wine or strong drink, neither you or your sons with you." Why do you think He did that? Why did God say that? Could it be that in all of the celebration Nadab and Abihu had allowed themselves to become drunk? And it wasn't where they got the fire, and it wasn't the incense, it was the way in which they conducted themselves in a drunkenness that caused God to take their life. It could be any of those or all of them. But they were destroyed. And God sent a message to every priest after them, you are ordained unto obedience. And those of you who have the privilege of coming near to God must treat Him as holy. We are a priesthood ordained to obedience. Called to obedience.

Do we even remind ourselves of that? Is it not obvious? First Peter 1:14, "As obedient children, do not be conformed to your former lusts." We are called to obedience.

Number seven...number seven, they were to have a high regard for the Word of God. They were to have a high regard for the Word of God. And I'm going to give you the last ones out of Malachi chapter 2. They were to have a high regard for the Word of God. Malachi chapter 2, Malachi the prophet living in a terrible time of apostasy in the land of Israel and here he indicts the apostate priests by comparing them with the God ordained principles of priesthood. Look at verse 4, Malachi 2, if you can't find it, it's the last book in the Old Testament. We could start at verse 1, "Now this

commandment is for you, O priests," they by this time had apostatized, "if you do not listen, if you do not take it to heart to give honor to My name, says the Lord of host, then I will send the curse upon you, I will curse your blessings and indeed I have cursed them already because you are not taking it to heart." Here was a heartless apostate indifferent priesthood.

Look at this, "Behold, I am going to rebuke your offerings and I will spread dung on your faces. The refuse of your feasts I'll smear in your face and you'll be taken away with it." What an incredible desecration of a priest to have the dung of their feasts spread on their faces. "Then you will know that I have sent this commandment to you that My covenant may continue with Levi, says the Lord of host." I made a covenant with Levi that out of him would come the priests, you have defiled that. And then he goes back in verse 5 and he says as if looking back to when it all started, "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 he 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." See the contrast.

And in verses 5 and 6 he goes back and he looks at the early days of the priesthood, the way it was when He ordained that the priests were to be faithful to the Word of God. And if you go back to Exodus and go back to say chapter 32 of Exodus you read in verse 26, "Moses stood in the gate of the camp and said, Whoever is for the Lord, come to me." You remember that? Do you remember the scene here? Moses had gone up into the mountain to get the law, he came back and the people were worshiping what? A golden calf. Moses stands up in the gate and says, "Whoever is for the Lord, come to me." Listen to this, "And all the sons of Levi gathered together to him." That's right. And then you know what he said to them? "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, every man of you put his sword on his thigh and go back and forth from gate to gate in the camp and kill every man his brother and kill every man his friend and kill every man his neighbor." You go in and slaughter all those idolaters. This is the sons of the Levi. And he says you go kill everybody and they did it. "They did as Moses instructed, three thousand men fell." Let me tell you something. Way back in the beginning the priests took the Word of God seriously. They took it seriously. They had a high regard for the sacredness of the Word of God. And that's what Malachi is saying that the true priests revered Me and stood in awe of My name and true instruction was in his mouth and unrighteousness was not found in his lips and he turned many back from iniquity. They were faithful to the Word of God.

From the very beginning God had designed the priests to be faithful. And from the earliest, Levi was. In Deuteronomy 33 the priests were told to teach ordinances to Jacob, teach the law of God to Israel. That was their job. They were faithful to the Word. By the way, it's just a footnote, Malachi probably has in mind one person, "My covenant with him," verse 5, who's that? Probably Phinehas, Aaron's

grandson, he was a zealous priest, you remember, who turned the wrath of God away and for that God rewarded him and made with him a covenant of peace, Numbers 25. That's what he's saying here. My covenant with him was one of life and peace. Phinehas becomes an emblem of a godly priesthood who takes the Word of God seriously.

Now let me add three quick things. Number eight, the priest had a walk with God, they had a walk with God. Would you notice verse 6? "They walked with Me in peace and uprightness." They had a walk with God.

Number nine, they had an impact on sinners. They had an impact on sinners. Verse 6 says, "He turned many back from iniquity."

And number ten, they were the messengers of God. They were the messengers of God. Verse 7, "He is the messenger of the Lord of hosts."

Do you know what it means to be a priest? The priests were chosen of God, cleansed of sin, clothed for service, and anointed. What does that mean? We as priests are elect, we are forgiven and cleansed. We are clothed with righteousness. We are anointed with the Holy Spirit. The priests of old were prepared for their duties and ordained to obedience. We, too, by God's wonderful Spirit go through a time of preparation between our conversion and our usefulness and we, too, have been called to obedience.

Number seven, the priests had a high regard for the Word of God. So should we. We saw in 1 Peter 2 as babes desire the pure milk of the Word that you may grow. As priests they had a walk with God. They had an impact on sinners. And they were the messengers of the Lord. That's what it means to be a priest. Pretty rich, isn't it?

You want to know something? That's what you are. That's right. You've been elect. You've been cleansed. You've been clothed with the righteousness of Jesus Christ. You've been anointed for spiritual service by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. You've been prepared by the Spirit for spiritual service, having been gifted by Him with spiritual gifts. You have been called unto obedience because God has ordained that you should walk in good works. Such a marvelous truth. You have been given the great privilege of taking the Word of God seriously and applying it to your life. You have been given a walk with God. You have been allowed to have an impact on sinners. And you have become a messenger of the Lord.

What more could we say? As a priest you now have a privilege. Would you look at one last thought which we'll save for next time? You have a privilege. What is it? To offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. Now you know you're a priest. Next Sunday night I'm going to tell you what a priest does. Now you know what a priest is, right? Next time, what a priest does.

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