Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Believer's Privileges, Part 3: Access Part 2
Scripture: 1 Peter 2:5b
Code: 60-19

Let's open our Bibles tonight for a time in the Word of God. And what a refreshing and what a joy it is to share together, to meet together, to rejoice together as we have tonight. But the center and focus of our ministry together is always the Word of God and so we find ourselves drawn tonight to 1 Peter chapter 2 and we're looking at verses 4 through 10...1 Peter chapter 2 verses 4 through 10. We're talking about spiritual privileges spiritual privileges...not spiritual duties but spiritual privileges. And as I have pointed out to you in 1 Peter 2:4 through 10, this significant passage lists for us a number of spiritual privileges. In fact there are so many of them and they are so deep and rich and far reaching that we are taking a rather lengthy time working our way through this portion of the great epistle.

You know, it is so wonderful to live in the confidence that God blesses His people, isn't it? That God never fails to bless His people, that when we are faithful to Him He honors us. I was reading a couple of weeks ago about a pastor and this pastor was out playing golf with a new convert...new Christian. And the new convert had a terrible temper. And after missing the putt on the third hole that should have been easily made, he began to scream, "I missed, I missed, how could I miss?" And he went into a fit of rage. He kicked up a piece of the green and broke his putter, threw the pieces as far as he could throw them. It was really an incredible outburst of anger.

The pastor was shocked and felt his duty to warn the young Christian that there were serious consequences to that kind of temper. So he said to him, "My friend, I feel that I need to tell you that what you've done today could result in a very serious response from heaven." He said, "There's an angel called Zapriel and Zapriel zaps people who have bad tempers. His primary mission, in fact, is to search for the worst outburst of anger and zap the one responsible. And when Zapriel is about to zap, a fire ball forms in the sky and begins to roll around, plummet to the earth and strikes the person who has exhibited the temper. And I want to tell you, you are a likely candidate for zapping." He said, "I've never seen such an outburst for a missed putt."

Well the new convert listened intently. Three holes later missed another one and launched into the same outburst of anger, "I missed, I missed, I missed, how could I miss?" And managed to use his new putter to take a huge divot out of the green. And before the pastor could say a word, a ball of fire began to circle in the heavens, plummeted to the earth and consumed the pastor. And suddenly a voice came out of heaven saying, "I missed, I missed, how could I miss?"

Well I think you get the point. Wouldn't it be...wouldn't it be absolutely awful when God missed when He was trying to bless and missed when He was endeavoring to judge? Aren't you glad that God doesn't miss? I am. I really am.

That leads me into the thought that when God sends down blessing, He always targets in on His people. He is the God who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus, says Ephesians 1:3. And Galatians 3:9 says, "You who are of faith are blessed." God judges the ungodly, but God blesses His children. And He never misses. And He never gets confused about what belongs to whom.

And so, the great passage before us is a passage that lists the blessings which never miss falling upon those who belong to him. Peter has been talking about spiritual duty. In fact, from chapter 1 verse 13 through chapter 2 verse 3 his theme was the duty of the believer toward God, toward others and even toward his own life. And now he is done with duties for a while and he wants to talk about privileges. And how wonderful it is to talk about our spiritual privileges. So I hope you don't mind if we spend a little longer time in terms of weeks going through these privileges. I want them to sink deeply into your heart.

But would you notice that the privileges are based on the first statement in verse 4 where Peter writes, "And coming to Him." You see, everything with regard to spiritual privilege is predicated on coming to Christ. Everything begins when you come to Him. And by the way, the indication as I told you a couple of weeks ago of the text here is that this coming is not a one time coming but a way of life. It is a continual drawing nigh. Oh it had a beginning point but it really doesn't have an ending point. As we come to Him and continue remaining in His wonderful presence, we become the beneficiaries of magnificent spiritual privileges. And so, from verses 4 through 10 there are no commands, there are no exhortations, just privileges.

And I told you that in a wonderful way Peter takes the same spiritual truths and rearranges them into different privileges. It's like a spiritual kaleidoscope where you have a few colored rocks but every time you turn the end you get a different beautiful picture. And so Peter under the inspiration of the Spirit of God rotates the end of the spiritual kaleidoscope and every time the rocks are rearranged we see a magnificent new colorful image of spiritual privilege...many patterns come before our eyes.

First of all, in verse 5, the first spiritual privilege, union with our Lord. We come to Him as to a living stone, rejected by men but choice and precious in the sight of God, you also as living stones are being built up as a spiritual house. He is a living stone, we are living stones. He is the foundation and the cornerstone and we are built up upon that to become a spiritual house, the habitation of God in the Spirit. And so he is celebrating our union with Christ. We are joined to Him. We are of the same essence. He's a stone, we're a stone. We are part of the same spiritual house that is the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit. And one of our privileges then, union with the Lord.

The second privilege, and where we are right now, we began last week to talk about it, admission to the Lord, or access to the Lord. Not only union with Him but admission to His presence. How so? Look at verse 5, "Because we are a holy priesthood." And I felt last week that I needed to share with you what it meant to be a priest. I mean, we talk about a holy priesthood and we say that's wonderful, what does it mean? I've never met an Old Testament Levitical priest, that's not part of our culture, how am I to understand that? So we looked at what a holy priesthood means. If I don't know what a priest is then I don't know what a holy priest is. And if I am one, I want to know what I am, don't you? So we mentioned ten characteristics of a priest in the Old Testament that are directly paralleled in the holy priesthood of the new covenant that we enjoy.

First of all, we noted that a priest was chosen by God. Secondly, that the priests were cleansed of sin. Thirdly, that they were clothed in special garments for service. Fourthly, they were anointed. They were anointed with authority. Fifthly, they were prepared for duty. Remember there was a period of time between their anointing and their functioning in which they were to be spiritually readied for service. And next, they had been called to obedience. That was illustrated, you remember, when the two sons of Aaron the first day of their priesthood ministry offered strange fire to God and they were burned to a crisp and God didn't miss that time. He never does. Because God was saying you were called as a priesthood unto obedience, you disobey, it's serious.

And then we noted also that they were ordained to be submissive to the Word of God. Further we saw that the priesthood involved men who were privileged to walk with God. And Malachi 2 verses 4 to 6 it describes the priest as one who walks with God. That is in constant fellowship and communion with the Lord. And then number nine, they had been made to impact sinners. They had an evangelistic purpose. And number ten, they were messengers of the Lord called to preach and proclaim.

And so, in those ten ways we too are priests. We are chosen by God before the foundation of the world to be His own. We are cleansed of sin through the marvelous miracle of regeneration. We are clothed for service with the garment of the righteousness of Christ. We are anointed with power by the anointing of the Holy Spirit. We are prepared for duty through spiritual gifts and instruction. We are called unto obedience through the ministry of the Spirit of God in sanctification. We are made submissive to the Word in that God grants to us the love of the truth. And we too have been allowed to walk with God in communion and fellowship. And we have been made to have an impact on sinners for you are, said our Lord, the light of the world. And we too are the messengers of the Lord, called to give witness to the gospel, to preach the unsearchable riches of Jesus Christ.

Those ten things sum up the nature of our priesthood and if you want more detail, there's plenty of it in last week's tape. That's the nature of our priesthood. What an incredible privilege. What a sacred role do we fulfill. But that's the nature of our priesthood, what is the function of it? And that's what I

want to share with you tonight. What is the function of our priesthood? Now that we know who we are as priests, a holy priesthood, what do we do?

Go back to verse 5. We are a holy priesthood and here is our function, "To offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." Now what was the function of a priest in the Old Testament? Primarily to offer up...what?...sacrifices primarily to offer God sacrifices. They functioned in the temple as those who brought the animals before God to be offered as sacrifices. When the Lord Jesus Christ came, all animal sacrifices ceased. And the only sacrifices remaining, Peter says, are spiritual sacrifices, no more animal sacrifices, no more physical sacrifices, just spiritual sacrifices. And the priesthood is not anymore the priesthood from the tribe of Levi through the loins of Aaron, but it is a spiritual priesthood, a holy priesthood made up of redeemed members of the church of Jesus Christ.

It was obviously true that when the priests of the old covenant offered up sacrifices they were sacrifices who had...which had to be acceptable to God. The lamb they offered, the animal they offered had to be the best, the blameless, spotless, without blemish lamb. And the sacrifice had to be offered in such a way that it violated none of God's commands. That's what cost the life of the sons of Aaron because they did not offer a sacrifice acceptable to God. We then as priests, mark it in your mind, have a great privilege but we also have a corresponding responsibility. And as priests we are privileged to have admission to God's presence, access to His presence but we have the wonderful privilege paralleling a very serious responsibility in which we are to offer sacrifices that are acceptable to God...acceptable to Him.

And not every sacrifice, not every offering is acceptable to Him. Saul found that out when he offered to God the forbidden animals that he had taken in the spoil from the victory that he had. And God cursed his entire line and said no one out of your loins will ever again be king over My people for you have offered an unacceptable sacrifice. And we in this new covenant priesthood must also offer that which is acceptable to God.

The whole purpose of our sacrifices, our spiritual sacrifices is to gain the approval of God. Now would you notice one key in verse 5? It says that they are to be sacrifices acceptable to God coming through...whom?...Jesus Christ. He alone is the mediator, He is the one who gives us access to God. He gives us the right of entry and only when we come in His name, only when we come consistent with His will does it please God.

Do you remember in John 14:13 and 14 where Jesus said, "I'm going to go away but don't worry about it, you'll have access to Me and whatever you ask in My name I will do it?" Remember that? The key there is "whatever you ask in My name," not whatever you ask. Whatever you ask in My name. What does that mean? Consistent with who I am, consistent with My will, consistent with My plan, consistent with My Kingdom. Whatever you ask consistent with who I am and what I desire to

accomplish, I will do it. And so here we find the same idea. Whatever offering we offer to God in order to be acceptable must be consistent with the person and work of Christ. It must fit into His plan. It must be conformed to His design as revealed in the Word of God. The only spiritual sacrifice comes through Jesus Christ consistent with who He is and consistent with His will and work. It must be a pure act of sacrifice. It must come from a pure motive and it must extend to a pure goal. The pure motive is to honor God. The pure goal is to honor God. And the act must also honor God.

You say, "Well how can I know whether my spiritual sacrifices really honor God?" Very simple. The qualifier is, are they those things that are set forth on the pages of the Word of God? God has outlined for us the spiritual sacrifices we are to offer. And I want to give you a list for you to jot down, think about and allow the Spirit of God to apply in your life. Here are the acceptable spiritual sacrifices. When they are offered from a pure motive to honor Christ and a pure goal to glorify God. Here are those pure acts.

Let's go, first of all, to Romans chapter 12. In Romans chapter 12 there are two very familiar verses. The chapter begins and it begins the practical application section of this great epistle. But would you please notice how clearly this spiritual sacrifice is noted? "I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God," and by the way, the mercies of God are those things which God has mercifully done for you and they have been recorded in chapters 1 through 11, so the word or phrase "the mercies of God" refers back to eleven chapters of God's merciful gracious goodness toward sinners. And so Paul says, "Because of all of God's mercy to you, because...if I can add the words of Peter...you are now a holy priesthood, the Lord wants you to offer up spiritual sacrifices and here is where it begins. I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God to start your priestly work by presenting your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God. That is your spiritual service of worship."

You are a priest. You are involved in spiritual service. You are involved in worshiping God. And it begins with the presentation of your body as a living and holy sacrifice. What does he mean by body? Just what he says. All of your human faculties. And where your priesthood begins is when you offer Him everything, every part of your human faculties. Your body must include the mind because in verse 2 it says, "Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect." God wants your body, including your mind. He wants all your faculties...your feet, your hands, your mind, your eyes, your mouth, your ears, every faculty of your human body God wants for His glory.

You remember in Romans 6 the Apostle Paul said that when you were in sin before you were saved you yielded your members as servants of sin? That's exactly what we mean here. The unregenerate person yields the members of his body. That word in the Greek literally has reference to bodily parts as servants to sin. But Romans 6 says when you believed you became the servants of righteousness. So Paul in that same chapter says don't yield your members as servants of unrighteousness anymore...your body, your eyes, your mouth, your ears, your mind, your hands, your feet. Every part

of your body is to be given in sacrifice to God for holy purposes.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

That's why Paul says it's a great battle. But in 1 Corinthians 9:27, "I beat my body into submission." He cried out for power over his human flesh that he might present all his faculties to God. You're a priest but God doesn't want a dead animal, God wants a living sacrifice. That's the contrast. Not a dead one. He doesn't want you as a priest to offer anything dead, He wants you to offer a living sacrifice, presenting all that you are to Him.

The classic illustration would be Abraham. Abraham took Isaac, you remember, to Mount Moriah because God told him to take his son and kill him. And you remember he lifted the knife to plunge it into the heart of Isaac and God stopped him and provided a ram for the sacrifice. That provides for us a very interesting contrast. If Abraham had killed his son, Isaac would have been a dead sacrifice. It would have been a painful thing for Abraham to do, and Isaac would have been a dead sacrifice. But Abraham would have made a living sacrifice because in killing Isaac he would have sacrificed all his hopes, all his dreams, all the promises of God that had been given to him about a seed that would come through his loins that would be as numerous as the sand of the sea and the stars of the heaven. He would have literally sacrificed everything he held precious...everything. That's a living sacrifice.

It's not when you offer something dead, it's when you offer everything you are, everything you have, everything you hope to be, all your dreams, all your hopes, all your aspirations, all your faculties and you say, "Lord, it's all yours." That's the total kind of commitment that a priest is called on to offer.

Secondly, let's go to Hebrews chapter 13...Hebrews chapter 13. And we find here again the function of a new covenant priest in terms of that which he is commissioned to do. In Hebrews chapter 13 and verse 15, speaking regarding Christ it says, "Through Him," and does that not remind you of what we just read in 1 Peter 2:5 that the spiritual sacrifices we offer to God are offered through Jesus Christ? The same thing again, in His name and according to His work and according to His will and according to His person. So here the writer of Hebrews says, "Through Him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of...what?...praise to God." What do you mean by that? "That is the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name." Isn't that wonderful? He not only wants all your faculties but He wants your praise...that's an offering.

Do you understand what it means to praise? You understand what it means....if I just said, "Okay, everybody, on the count of three everybody praise the Lord." Would you know what to do? Would you just say, "Praise the Lord...praise the Lord"? Or do you know what to do? What does it mean to praise

the Lord?

Well let me tell you what it means. Just simply. Number one, it means to recite His attributes. Typically praise in the old covenant was the recitation of the glorious nature of God, the recitation of the glorious attributes of God. And if you have any difficulty doing that, you need do nothing more than open your Bible at the Psalms anyplace. "Bless the Lord, O my soul, O Lord my God, Thou art very great. Thou art clothed with splendor and majesty, covering Thyself with light as with a cloak," and off goes the psalmist in Psalm 104. Reciting God's attributes, that's praise, with a heart that exalts God, exalting Him for His wisdom, exalting Him for His knowledge, exalting Him and honoring Him and respecting Him and reverencing Him for who He is.

Secondly, praise involves reciting His works. Not only His attributes but His works. Not only who He is but what He's done. And if there were no other reason than that to study the Old Testament, that would be reason enough, wouldn't it? So that you might know everything that God has done. And as we recite the great redemptive work of God, that is praise. Praise isn't just saying, "Praise the Lord...Praise the Lord...Praise the Lord." It is reciting His attributes in a way that exalts Him for that, reciting His works in a way that exalts Him for that. Thirdly, saying thanks for both...saying thanks for both. Thank You for who You are, Thank You for what You've done.

Now let's get practical. Do you live your life like that? Are you an absolutely incorrigible incessant praiser? Are you almost out of touch with reality you're so filled with praise and thanksgiving? Hahaha, hardly. We've been doing a little bit of interior work, haven't we, in Philippians talking about grumbling. Well this is the other side, you know. One who constantly offers the sacrifice of praise, "O God," reciting all Your attributes, "O God, all that You've done, O thank You, thank You for these things," that's your spiritual sacrifice.

You know, when you boil the Christian life down, this is it, isn't it? It isn't, you know, how many times do you attend church? How many functions do you go to? How many Christian records do you have in your house as opposed to secular ones..or Christian tapes or whatever? How many seminars have you..." No, really spiritual life comes down to this, have I given my whole mind and body and all my faculties as a living sacrifice to God to do with as He will? All my hopes, aspirations and dreams included? And secondly, am I constant praiser, praiser, praiser? That is the sacrifice He wants.

Third, go the next verse, verse 16, Hebrews 13. This is pretty simple, "And do not neglect doing good and sharing." Boy, that's right down there, isn't it? Doing good...that means doing good things, doing right things...the opposite of sinning. So the next element of spiritual sacrifice is doing good, doing what is right, doing what is righteous, spiritual conduct that honors God. You see, we're right down there on the bottom shelf on the bottom line of the Christian life here. Being a spiritual priest means I offer everything I am. It means I incessantly praise God. And it means I do good. That's a spiritual sacrifice.

When you do any righteous thing, any righteous word out of your mouth, any righteous act, reproving a brother, restoring a brother, loving someone, helping someone, doing any righteous act, studying the Word of God, sitting under the preaching of the precious truth, any of it is a spiritual sacrifice in the name of Christ that glorifies God.

Let's go to the next one in verse 16. Sharing...sharing, that's another thing. That's another spiritual sacrifice. It goes just beyond doing good and it specifically names sharing. What does that mean? That means giving up your resources sacrificially to meet the need of someone else. That's a spiritual sacrifice. Now let me say it again. God doesn't want a sin offering like in the Old Testament. He doesn't want a trespass offering. He doesn't want a meal offering. He doesn't want a wave offering. He doesn't want a sheep offering. He doesn't want any physical offering at all. What He wants is a spiritual sacrifice and the spiritual sacrifice is my body, my mind, all that I am, praise, righteous deeds and generosity, generous sharing. Notice the end of verse 16, "For with such...what?...sacrifices God is...what?...pleased."

See, this is where the Christian life comes right down to the bottom. Can I give you another illustration of this? Look at Philippians and we'll preview where we'll be in a few months, Philippians 4 verse 10. Paul is a prisoner in Rome. The Philippians who love him very deeply have sent him some money. He is very grateful for their gift and he expresses why. Would you notice this? Philippians 4:10, "I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at last you have revived your concern for me. Indeed, you were concerned before but you lacked opportunity." I mean, you've always been concerned, he says, but boy, you've really revived it and you've had an opportunity and you've been so generous. And what he means there is the money that he received, the money that was brought to him from the Philippian church. And then he says in verse 11, "Look, it's not that I speak from want." It isn't that I really wanted your gift. It isn't that I needed your gift. "For I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means. I also know how to live in prosperity. In any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me."

You see what he's saying? It's kind of interesting. He said thank you for your gift, thank you for the expression of your kindness, thank you for your concern. I just want you to know I didn't want it, I didn't need it and I didn't seek it. Because I can handle all the adversity that comes as well as the prosperity. But then he says in verse 14, listen to this, "Nevertheless you have done well to share with me in my affliction." You did a good thing because you shared. Whether I really was desperate or not isn't the issue, it is your sharing that was such a good thing. And then in verse 15 he says, "And you yourselves also know, Philippians, that at the first preaching of the gospel after I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone." That is so sad. You know, this man had such a sad ending to his life. Nobody came to his defense when he was tried. Nobody sent him any money to meet his needs. He said all in Asia have forsaken me and I only

have one person I can send to you that loves me and will show you my ways in the Lord and that's Timothy, everybody else has abandoned me. Demas forsook me having loved the present world. Sad, sad ending to his life.

"Nobody...nobody sent me anything but you alone, for even in Thessalonica you sent a gift more than once for my needs." Then he says it again. "Not that I seek the gift itself but I seek...now watch this...for the profit which increases to your account." Did you get that? He says you know why it's so good that you give? Because of the way it will profit your own spiritual life. Why? God blesses the generous. I'm so glad, not because I want it, I'm so glad because you gave it therefore you put yourself in the place of being blessed by God. He says again in verse 18, "I have received everything in full. I have an abundance, I am amply supplied having received from Epaphroditus what you sent, a fragrant aroma, and acceptable...what?...sacrifice well pleasing to God." And that's what he wants to hone in on. You know what's so wonderful about your gift? It was a sacrifice acceptable well pleasing to God. There a classic illustration of the sacrifice of sharing, of the sacrifice of generosity, of the sacrifice of giving.

You say, "Yeah, but when they give who's going to meet their need?" Verse 19, "And my God shall supply all your needs according to His...what?...riches in glory in Christ Jesus." Paul's a happy man because these dear Philippians were the love of his heart. And I'll tell you something right now, nothing makes the pastor more joyful, nothing makes him more satisfied than to see his beloved church offering up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God, functioning as a holy priesthood and therefore entering in to the place of blessing.

What are spiritual sacrifices? I offer myself. I offer my praise. I offer my good works. And I share and I give with generosity.

Would you look with me for a moment at Romans 15:16? Romans 15:16, Paul says in verse 16 that he was a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles, do you see that at the beginning of the verse? He says, "I'm a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles," now listen to this next line, "ministering as a...what's the word?...priest, ministering as a priest the gospel of God that my offering of the Gentiles might become acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit." That's marvelous.

You know what he's saying here? Just tremendous. He says I'm a priest and you know what I'm offering God? I'm offering the souls of those I have been privileged to lead to Christ. Have you given God that kind of an offering? Have you had the privilege of lifting up a friend, a neighbor, a classmate, a relative and saying, "Lord Jesus, this is my sacrifice, this one who came to Christ because I was faithful to be available to be the instrument You could use"?

What are our spiritual sacrifices? Our whole self, praise, good works, sharing, generosity and the souls of redeemed people, that's a spiritual sacrifice. How long since you lifted up a soul to the Lord

and said I offer You this soul as a sacrifice, well pleasing in your sight? Maybe that's the epitome.

Ephesians 5 and verse 2, Ephesians 5 verse 2 says, "Walk...listen to this...walk in love just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma." You know what the message here is? Christ's love which resulted in His sacrifice was a sacrifice acceptable to God. Christ's love which resulted in His death was an acceptable sacrifice. What's the parallel? Your love demonstrated in your selfless humility is a sacrifice well pleasing to God. So add this, love. Sacrificial love for one another is well pleasing to God, well pleasing to God.

Are you noting that these things are just basic things in the Christian life? That's right. Because our life is a priesthood. Let me give you one more. Revelation 8:3...Revelation 8:3 and here it says, "Another angel came and stood at the altar," the seventh seal is about to be broken in the Tribulation time as the Lord Jesus takes over the earth, "and an angel came and stood at the altar holding a golden censer and much incense was given to him...listen to this...that he might add it to the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense with the prayers of the saints went up before God." Our last element is what? Prayer. That is a spiritual sacrifice to God.

It begins when I offer everything I am, my whole body, mind, everything I am. Spiritual sacrifice of praise is to follow. Then a spiritual sacrifice of doing good. And then a spiritual sacrifice of generous sharing and giving. Then the spiritual sacrifice of souls won to the Savior. And then the spiritual sacrifice of love, humble selfless loving service to others. And finally the spiritual sacrifice of prayer. That too is a sweet aroma in the nostrils of God.

Beloved, we are a priesthood. And as a priesthood we have the privilege of offering up spiritual sacrifices. Let me say this to you, the only reason the church exists in this context, listen carefully, the only reason the church exists is to stimulate your priestly function. The church is not the end in itself. If all you do is come and go, that's not it. Unless you go out of this place to offer up spiritual sacrifices, we have failed and you have failed to respond.

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