

The Royal Priesthood and the Bible

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Introduction

If you adopt a baby, the new arrival knows little of what has actually just occurred. The new family structure, its heritage, its agendas and purposes as well as its legacy and inheritances ... all that unfolds in time. As the one who initiated this new reality for this new family member, you will determine when is the right time to educate the new arrival. You will assuredly begin with the basics and progress from there.

When an individual becomes a Christian, he/she is “*born again*” (1Pet 1:22-23) and is immediately adopted as a son or daughter. This is huge. For starters, this individual is not an *adopted* son or an *adopted* daughter but, rather, adopted *as* a son or *as* a daughter - a full standing son or daughter. One has been ushered into His *eternal* family - and all new arrivals come in the same way with this same standing. One is now part of a new family structure, with its unique heritage, agenda and purposes, as well as its legacy and inheritances. At that instant of becoming “*a new creature*,” (2Cor 5:17) many other momentous things happen. But, first things first. For this “*babe in Christ*,” (1Cor 3:1) an orderly grasp on the basics is critical. So let’s briefly address a few of those.

To begin, there is a full pardon by God, based solely on the blood of Christ. Justice for our violations against God is fully satisfied by Jesus’ sacrifice of Himself for those who receive Him (Jn 1:12), believe in Him (Jn 3:16), call on Him (Ro 10:13), turn to Him (2Cor 3:16), etc. Also time, as we know it, is a created thing and God Himself is not trapped in it - so, this granted pardon covers the entirety of one’s lifespan.

On top of this pardon, we are also granted the righteousness of Christ. He Himself wrought this when He was born under the Law (given through Moses) and then fulfilled all its requirements of righteousness. That record is granted each son or daughter as a gift. It is “*the gift of righteousness*” (Ro 5:17).

This pardon *and* righteousness package is bestowed on every single son and daughter. This bestowment is full, complete and permanent. God has done it this way so all boasting is excluded (Ro 3:27). It is upon these two gifts each child independently stands and can now transact with God. Think of these gifts like a last name. Each child carries that last name without regard to gender, age or maturity level. That last name is not affected by education level, aptitude, occupation, etc., etc., etc. It is a birthright each child carries - even though each one is as different as night and day.

So, while some things are universal to each of His children, at the same time each son or daughter is completely unique. For example, every child He brings in, has been created, “*for good works that He has prepared beforehand*” (Eph 2:10). Then, for these purposes, He bestows the proper giftings (1Cor 12:11) and then, in real time, orchestrates opportunities to engage in these works or callings (Phil 2:13 and Rev 3:7-8). This part of one’s relationship with his/her new Father is as unique as one’s physical fingerprints.

With all this accomplished, the Creator Himself then supplies security that cannot be breached by any force - seen or unseen. We are His family. He has the power, and desire, to protect and keep His own (Jn 10:27-30). Of course, one’s understanding of

these fundamentals deepens through the entirety of one's time in this age - and possibly through eternity for all I know.

So, with all this in mind, let's go back and look at another universal gifting God has bestowed on each child the instant he/she was born again. This particular gift is a position, an office ... a role. It is the priesthood of each believer.

“He has made us to be ...

... a kingdom, priests to His God and Father” (Rev 1:6). “You also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood ... a royal priesthood” (1Pet 2:5,9). The understanding that each Christian has been granted this office at the moment of new birth, was a primary driver in the Reformation of the 16th Century that ushered in the Protestant movement. But as we shall see, this revelation soon fell prey to the church structures in almost all of the ensuing factions/denominations. But first, what priesthood are we talking about? What order or lineage?

For starters, the only priesthood that matters is one that God Himself recognizes. Think about that for a minute. Even from an earthly perspective, if someone comes into the office of a CEO and informs the CEO that he/she works for and represents him, is that CEO obligated to say, “Okay.”? For millennia, there are, and have been, priests and priesthoods all over the world. Is God required to submit to their institutions? Is He obligated to respect their beliefs, procedures, processes and rites - even if they are sincere, ornate, meticulous, and articulate? When the Lord is called the King of kings, or the Lord of lords, we could use a more understandable phrasing for us in the West ... He's the Boss of bosses or the CEO of ceos. He alone dictates who serves Him ... and how.

The most well known Biblical priesthood are the Levites of the Mosaic Law. The instructions concerning this order of priests is documented in great detail. Prior to Moses, God did communicate in varied ways, but only one was actually called, “*a priest of God Most High*” (Gen 14:18). That was Melchizedek. This is later called, “*the order of Melchizedek*” in Psalm 110:4 and is based upon “*an indestructible life*” and is a “*priesthood permanently*” (Heb 7:16,24). Jesus is now, and forever, the Great High Priest of the order of Melchizedek (Heb 4:14-15 and Heb 5:4-6). Let's take a quick look at the Levitical priesthood which came *after* the Melchizedek order.

The Levitical Priests

In round numbers, Abram met Melchizedek (he wasn't even Abraham yet) close to 2100 B.C. Moses exited Egypt around 1450 B.C. So the Levitical priesthood arose a full 600 years after Abram's encounter with Melchizedek. Since the priesthood order of Melchizedek is based upon “*an indestructible life*” (Heb 4:14-15) - I have no math for figuring when that order was instituted by the Creator ... or even why exactly. But, for our purposes here, there is no doubt the Levitical Priesthood system came later and, as we will soon see, just for a season.

Under the Mosaic Law, priests only came from the tribe of Levi, specifically Aaron's sons of that tribe. But even some of them were disqualified if they had some physical defect (a list in Lev 21:16-23). And even those cleared to serve as priests would be “*cut off from before Me*” if he was “*unclean*” when approaching God with gifts from

a fellow Israelite who had dedicated some gift to the Lord (Lev 22:1-3). On at least two occasions, Israelites who violated how God was to be approached, were struck down in front of everyone by God Himself (See Lev 10:1-7 and 2Sam 6:1-11). Every member of the other eleven tribes were banned from entering the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place (which is sometimes called the Holy of Holies). The Most Holy Place (Holy of Holies) was accessed only once a year by the High Priest. Concerning many other matters about this priesthood arrangement, for our goals here, *“we cannot now speak in detail”* (Heb 9:5).

Return to the Earlier Melchizedek Priesthood Order

The moment Jesus died on the cross, the veil (or Parochet Curtain) in the Temple in Jerusalem was *“torn in two from top to bottom”* (Mt 27:51). This veil separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies - the heart of the entire Levitical priesthood arrangement. One account I read says the veil was between 45-60 feet high and 4 inches thick. Be that as it may, being torn from top to bottom was an act of God Himself - announcing a new era had come concerning God’s priesthood arrangement. God was finished with the Levitical priesthood. But, it turns out, that was just the tip of the iceberg. *“For when the priesthood is **changed**, out of necessity there takes place **a change of law also**”* (Heb 7:12). The word translated, *“changed”* (*metatithemi*) can also be translated, *“removed”*. The second word translated, *“a change”* (*metathesis*) is a different word. While it also carries the thought of, *“remove”* it also carries the thought of *“being translated, or changed”* to something else. So why did God remove and change His entire mode of interacting with man? There are many reasons. But, for our purposes here, the previous verse says, *“Now, if perfection was through the Levitical priesthood (for on the basis of it the people received the Law) what further need was there for another priest to arise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not be designated according to the order of Aaron (who were Levites)”* (Heb 7:11) The answer? *“... for the Law made nothing perfect”* (Heb 7:19a). Therefore it was set aside *“because of its weakness and uselessness”* (Heb 7:18b).

Concerning Jesus Himself, He *“was descended from Judah, a tribe with reference to which Moses spoke nothing concerning priests”* (Heb 7:14). So, under the Law of Moses, Jesus could never be a priest. Never. But Jesus is not just declared a priest ... He is *“a Great High Priest”* (Heb 4:14). How can this be? It is because Jesus is the High Priest *“according to the order of Melchizedek”* (Heb 7:17). Much of the early chapters of the Book of Hebrews brings up several points of this new arrangement, but chapters 7 through 10 are very intense and definitive on this entire priesthood of Christ matter. To look into this more deeply will be time well spent. But, along with the Levitical Priesthood being removed (the tip of the iceberg), the Law, given through Moses, *“He has made ... obsolete”* (Heb 8:13). Gone is that religious calendar. Gone is its financial demands (including the tithe). Gone is the sacrificial system. Completely gone is that system of how to properly relate to God. It is an entirely *“New Covenant”* (Heb 8:13) from top to bottom. Much of Galatians and Romans speak on this *“change of law”* (Heb 7:12). Again, time spent on examining this change will be time well spent. But let’s return to this priesthood matter. What does this mean for a Christian? What practical meaning applies?

God has stated that each of His children are members of “*a royal priesthood*” (1Pet 2:9). We must halt at this statement. Royal?? That has to do with kingly stuff. Priesthood? Each Christian is a priest? What order could that be? If we step back and look closer at Melchizedek, we discover he was not just a priest, but also a king. That is royalty (Gen 14:18 and Heb 7:1). Furthermore, his priesthood order was (is) based upon “*the power of an indestructible life*” (Heb 7:3 and 7:15-24). As believers, we are “*in Christ Jesus*” (1Cor 1:30) who is the King of all the kings (Rev 19:16) - so there is the royal part of our declared “*royal priesthood*” designation as “*He is not ashamed to call*” us “*His brethren*” (Heb 2:11). Furthermore, Christians have been given eternal life the moment they believed. “*... (H)e who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life* (present tense) ...” (Jn 5:24). Eternal life is an indestructible life. Concerning Jesus Himself, He is “*alive forevermore*” (Rev 1:18). So with Jesus, with Melchizedek and with each individual Christian there is a harmony of priesthood, royalty and eternal life.

Of course, the Bible never says the Christian’s “*royal priesthood*” is of Melchizedek’s order. In reality, it doesn’t really matter if it might be some other order or not. As long as God accepts those priests *that* is all that matters. But, I suspect Christians populate the Melchizedek order for more than just the three reasons of commonality in the previous paragraph. For example, if Jesus is the Great High Priest of Melchizedek’s order (which He is), as the *High Priest*, doesn’t that suggest an order populated ... with lower priests (similar to the Levitical order in that regard)? Thus, the designation of a *High* one. Also would there be an “*order*” ... if there was only *one* member in it (or two if Melchizedek is his own man and not a Christophany - an appearance of Christ in the Old Testament)?

Regardless of my *leaning* on this, here is what is indeed certain. Jesus said He is not ashamed to call us (Christians) “*His brethren*” (Heb 2:11). So, each one is in the Royal family. He has also given each believer eternal life (Jn 17:2) - thus an indestructible life. And He has declared we are “*a kingdom and priests*” (Rev 5:10). The word translated “*and,*” is “*kai,*” and can be translated, “*even*” - thus, “*a kingdom, even priests ...*”. Bottomline, if you have been born again, as His son or daughter, you are in an order of priests that the Almighty recognizes as legitimate. This is incredible favor - an astounding privilege - an amazing bestowal. Truly phenomenal. We must get some kind of understanding what that might mean for us. Read on!

The Current Priesthood Arrangement

I am not sure how long it took for this new arrangement to be understood in those early days after Christ’s death, but, by the time Peter wrote his letters and the author of Hebrews wrote his account, much of the fog in this war had evaporated. So, let’s see what we can discover about God’s new arrangement concerning His priests.

Christians are told to “*have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is His flesh*” (Heb 10:19-20). “*(T)he holy places*” is plural, so if the “*throne of the Majesty in the heavens*” is like the “*copy and shadow*” of the patterns God commanded to Moses, that means the Christian can go straight through any Outer Court, straight through The Holy Place and proceed directly into the Holy of Holies before His throne (see Heb

8:1,5). It is the blood of Christ and His “*gift of righteousness*” (Ro 5:17) that makes this entrance possible. Christians can now come directly before the Throne of Grace, before God the Father at any time and from any place and transact with the living Creator. Gone is the need to be an Israelite from the tribe of Levi and family of Aaron. You can be a Gentile from any place on the globe - of either gender. Gone is disqualification due to some physical malady. Gone are the garments, rituals or prohibitions on how often the Most Holy Place can be accessed. This is a massive sea change in about every way you can think of concerning this new priesthood God has called into being. And God Himself has granted this position/office to every single son and daughter in His family. The marvel and honor of this cannot be overstated.

As I have been working through this material, I have become acutely more aware that this gifted priesthood office to each Christian is exceedingly foundational as to who we are. It is more foundational than any gift we might have - or any role we play in this life. We *are* a kingdom of priests. We *are not* a kingdom of pastors. We *are not* a kingdom of administrators. We *are not* a kingdom of prophets, or teachers, or tongue speakers or interpreters, or helps or with gifts of healings, etc. But all of us are full fledged priests from the moment of salvation and probably through all eternity. Jesus “*holds His priesthood permanently*” (Heb 7:24), and just as He will never set this role aside ... I don’t think we will either. But the works we do here and many of the gifts exercised here *do* have an expiration date. But, I suspect our priesthood is permanent even though it may morph in some ways on the other side of this life. We *are* a kingdom ... of priests. It is a defining feature of His kingdom - it is populated *by priests*.

Actually, you have been operating in the role of a priest from the moment you were brought into His family to the present. You have known God is your Father and you can bring all matters to Him - great or small. And that is what you have done and continue to do. You also knew He could communicate with you - after all, you did “*hear His voice*” and came to, and through, His Son ... to Him. This arrangement between you and the Father is the simplest definition of being a priest to God. You do all the time - what a priest does. Let’s examine this more carefully.

A Priest

In God’s economy, a priest has a direct line to Him. The priest can bring matters directly to God and, just as important, God can bring matters directly to His priest. We will look at both dynamics in order. So, what do these priests *bring to God*? This falls into two broad categories. 1: Gifts and Sacrifices and, 2: Requests.

1: Gifts and Sacrifices - or Gifts/Sacrifices

As you can see, I have these separate - “**Gifts and Sacrifices**” but also connected - “**Gifts/Sacrifices.**” They are distinct, yet connected in the sense that both pertain to the priest himself/herself ... not in reference to another party. Also, in this matter, there are some major differences from the retired Levitical system - and are worth pointing out.

Probably the biggest change in this gifts/sacrifices arena is that much of the Levitical system dealt with sin mediation. Even the Levitical High Priest “*offered both gifts and sacrifices for sins ... as for the people, so also for himself*” (Heb 5:1,3). Our gifts/sacrifices do not deal with sin mediation at all. We never do that. We might confess

our sins, but we are not trying to somehow make up for them. *“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”* (1Jn 1:9). And we never do that for someone else. Each person must take up their sin problem for their own self - to be addressed between God and each individual ... one on One. For the Christian, Jesus, as our High Priest, has completely moved the sin sacrifice problem out the picture when He *“offered one sacrifice for sins for all time”* - Himself - and then *“sat down at the right hand of God”* (Heb 10:12). A Levitical priest never sat. *“(E)very priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins”* (Heb 10:11). Their task in this area was never solved. Jesus solved it for each Christian - for all eternity. This lack of a sin mediation function for self or others is a big point ... and a massive sea change from the Levitical priesthood (See Footnote A for another point on this). So what are the gifts/sacrifices we now bring?

First, *“(P)resent your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, well pleasing to God which is your rational (“logikos” - logical) service of worship”* (Ro 12:1). The dynamic is that Jesus bought us with His own blood, and as *purchased*, it is reasonable/logical to be completely at His disposal. Here is another way He states this. *“(P)resent yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and the members (of your body) as weapons of righteousness to God”* (Ro 6:13). I am not completely convinced this is a once-and-done deal because Paul said he *“died daily”* (1Cor 15:31) - died daily to his own agenda and purposes. But, maybe for some, it is a one time offering - never taken back. But, whatever the case, this is to be a willing posture on our part. Much of the Bible’s contents is to persuade us His injunctions are more than just a good idea - they are a great *deal* for us - indeed the most superlative of all possible choices. That is what occupies the vast lands behind the words, *“Follow Me”* (Lk 5:27). God, grant us sanity.

But, I also think the sacrifice or presentation/gift of ourself can be broken down into smaller pieces - *“the members of (our) body”* referenced above. Maybe, as we enter some opportunity to forward Him ... we should single out some particular member of our body, asking for His presence and power in it. So, if we have an opportunity to sing for Him - present our voice. Or, one’s fingers to play skillfully on some instrument. Or our feet guided to some person who is open to a spiritual discussion. Or maybe one’s thought patterns (brain) in organizing and delivering a gospel presentation, a teaching time, a preaching time, a counseling opportunity ... or in writing an article so as to help Christians know more fully who they are in this family of God! Such presentations to God, whether of our whole self or some member of our body, is a sacrifice/gift with endless applications as we progress through this age.

As I reflect on this, a cardinal call to all people in any age ... is to commit one’s way to the Lord (Psalm 37:5). Isn’t that a giving of your whole self to Him? That includes one’s time, health, resources - everything to Him. I think it is here that gifts to Him and sacrifices for Him may intersect. And this too can be broken into smaller pieces - not simply a one-and-done deal. For example, I have approached my entire Christian life as a series of chapters ... and even chapters inside a bigger chapter. So, when a job is over and I have taken a new job, that is the close of a chapter and the start of a new one. It’s *“in the books.”* When I recover from an illness, that closes the previous chapter of health (then sickness) - and I am now entering another chapter of health. With family changes, the old season is done and a new one has arrived. All of these changes are

seasons as none are the eternal state. So I thank Him for the old one being done (asking for healing from it if necessary, so no bitter root takes hold) - and I tell Him I hope I learned what He wanted me to learn - so I grew. Then, with the new chapter in front of me, I ask to continue growing and gaining deeper and wider convictions, understandings, wisdom, knowledge, behaviors . . . in short, I commit the new chapter to Him at its outset. Isn't all that a gifting/sacrifice to Him?

But regardless how God might classify such action by a priest coming before Him, there is at least one other important sacrifice our priesthood brings to the Throne in the Most Holy Place. And these are sprinkled in throughout our entire time-line. It is "*a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of the lips confessing (homologeo) to His Name*" (Heb 13:15). Some translate "*homologeo*" as, "*giving thanks to His Name*". While the Greek word, "*homologeo*" (homo, same + logo, account) does mean "*confess*," as this is a sacrifice **of praise** to God - praise automatically involves thanking Him. Bottomline is this. I think when we stop our world, look up and praise Him/thank Him with our speech, He counts this as *a sacrifice* on our part. We have taken time, a most precious commodity, and have given it exclusively to Him in that moment. A sacrifice of praise from His priest . . . moves Him. May we do this more as it is time well spent and is extremely healthy for our soul. It serves to ground us with correct thinking and, hence, actions to follow. At least it makes subsequent activity *a possibility* of being on target. Let's move to the second area of what we bring to God.

2: Requests and Supplications

As priests, this is the second area of our activity where we bring things to Him. This time, it can be in respect to one's own self, *but* it can also be on behalf of others. This is an enormous opportunity for us as priests - to bring matters we are concerned about to Him - asking for His action. And before Whom is this granted audience? The living, eternal Creator who is "*the God of all flesh. Is anything too difficult for Me?*" (Jer 32:27). In Hebrew, a rhetorical question is a the strongest form of a statement.

The degree of fervency and emotion in our petitions can vary widely. If it is something simple like, "*please help me concentrate when reading this article*" - the emotional intensity in the request may not be all that high. But, it still is a totally valid request. On the other hand, life and death struggles may draw out an urgency of the highest order as we "*draw near with confidence to the throne of grace in order that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need*" (Heb 4:17). Also, God fully expects that we will include the outcome we want to see with any petition. As far the timing of His response, the content of that response, or its circumstances - that is an entirely different matter. But, persistency on our part is not discouraged. Read about the persistent widow and the judge in Luke 18:1-8. Jesus told us to be like her!

There is one other interesting dynamic that might arise in some request and supplication. We are told the Holy Spirit "*helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words*" (Ro 8:26). How often this occurs, I have no idea. Maybe it is much more often than we realize. We truly see through "*a glass darkly*" (1Cor 13:12) as to Who it is we are approaching. Additionally, I have found myself in many situations where I have no idea what God's agenda is - and I am just before Him hoping my "*fog of war*" is being

enhanced by the Holy Spirit with sharpened and precise requests for God's attention and assistance.

Specific prayer requests can move Him ... and those affected by our requests may not know divine assistance displayed to them was the direct result of a royal priest's labor on their behalf. And we might not know until He shows us at The Judgment what He did in response to our petition. "*A petition of a righteous man is very strong, being made effectual*" (Ja 5:16. This is a more literal rendering of that verse. It is God Himself who makes the request "*effectual*").

In light of the preceding paragraphs, please explain to me how any Christian ... is a layman.

Let's now look at the other aspect of our access into the Most Holy Place. While we do bring things to the Throne, there are also things that come ...

From The Throne

Because the sin problem between God and the Christian has been dealt with, His hands are *free to work* with His priest in unique, powerful and constructive ways. This is One-on-one activity *from* the Throne. Now He can impart theological insight at will as "*His private counsel is with the upright*" (Pr 3:32). The goal is to equip the Christian to be more on point with His priorities, agendas, will, and ways. Sometimes this is just for one's general spiritual growth, but sometimes this material is for the need of the moment. "*When they deliver you up, do not become anxious about how or what you will speak; for it will be given you in that hour what you are to speak. For it is not you who speak, but it is the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you*" (Mt 10:19-20). "*Like apples of gold in settings of silver is a word spoken in its circumstances*" (Pr 25:11). So this imparted information is for His priest's well-being as he/she navigates this life. I think this ties in with Jesus' statement, "*My sheep hear My voice, and I know them and they follow Me*" (Jn 10:27). He personally directs His kingdom of priests The Great High Priest working with His lower priests.

So, how does this communication come? Any way He so chooses. While I have never heard an audible voice, that doesn't mean He is mute and cannot do that if He so chooses. He can use dreams (I have had one I know was Him as it changed my entire life direction for the good. My eldest daughter as well had a dream that dramatically changed her life). Peter had a midday vision that changed history (Acts 10: read the whole chapter)! But, in my experience, there have been two consistent channels the Lord has used to communicate with me. One has been the Bible itself and the other ... people - believers *and* unbelievers. Let's take these in order.

Priests - and God's use of the Bible

I will be the first to say ... this is a bit tricky and it is pretty subjective as well. When I say "*subjective*," what I mean is that I cannot prove God has used His word and "*spoken*" that ... to me. What part of the Bible was directed directly to me? Moses' materials ... to me? Samuel's materials? Isaiah wrote ... to me? Paul's letters? I've never been to any of the areas he wrote to - and I wasn't around in the First Century anyway. So, how does this work?

In addressing this, I think we must talk a little "*theology*" - specifically about

principles on properly interpreting any given Bible passage and any personal application of it. Don't get blurry eyed here. It is not that bad.

Exegesis versus Eisegesis - or “In Context” versus “Out of Context”

These are two compound Greek words that are transliterated into English. The first is, “*ek + egesis*” and the second is, “*eis + egesis*.” The “*egesis*” part means, “*to guide*.” So, what makes these two words different is the first part - which are two different prepositions. “*Ex*” is a preposition meaning, *motion out of something having been in it*. So, “*exegesis*” is the work of *guiding out* of Scripture *what is actually there*. So, ... keeping a passage in its context. On the other hand, the preposition, “*eis*” (of “*eisegesis*”) is *motion toward and entering into something having never been in it*. So, it is motion *from outside* - working to get into something. So, in this case, a Bible passage is taken out of its true context, and then imposed into some other matter. The goal is to use the “*out of context*” passage to shore up some point. This is meant to give authority to the outside point - the authority of God Almighty Himself. This may surprise you, but concerning this dynamic, I think there is both *legal* and *illegal eisegesis*. But before that, let's first examine exegesis.

Exegesis - “In Context”

There are five traditional principles (hermeneutic principles) that are commonly used in the effort to “*guide out*” of a passage what is being said. They are *lexical-syntactical* (word and grammar studies), *historical-cultural* (traditions and politics at the time of writing), *context of a verse* (avoid taking a statement out of context), *theological analysis* (comparing all verses on the topic from all the places in the Bible), and *special literature determination* (is the passage clearly poetic and filled with symbolism, or is a simple historic account, etc.). Such work (exegesis) should be applied toward every passage. There is always a proper context and meaning to everything God has communicated - in its historical time and place. There is always benefit in such an exercise. But, if strictly applied to each passage and these principles being the end of the story, wouldn't the Bible be a dry well, simply a history book, as none of it was literally written to me? Now let's look at eisegesis.

Eisegesis - “Out of Context” - The Legal Kind

For starters, The New Testament writers regularly referenced Old Testament passages in order to shore up some point they were making. Oftentimes, that passage was taken completely out of its context and meaning ... yet, we believe these writers were inspired by the Holy Spirit. If I am correct about this, that means ... the Holy Spirit engaged in eisegesis. So, there is a *legal eisegesis*. Check out Paul's use of Psalm 116:10 in 2Corinthians 4:13. “*I believed, therefore I spoke*.” I have always wanted to do an exhaustive study of each New Testament use of an Old Testament passage. My goal would be to see what “*hermeneutic violations*” the Holy Spirit authored. It would then be obvious that while our five traditionally accepted hermeneutic principles should be consulted when seeking to understand any given passage, they are still man-made “*rules*” and should be treated as “*rules of thumb*.” The bigger question then becomes ... if God has chosen to eisegete His work *legally* through Paul, can He do the same to (or

through) us if He so chooses? You already know I believe He has such liberty. For example, ...

Very early in my Christian life, I desperately wanted to know the fate of the USA. Was it the Babylon of Revelation? (Rev 18 - read it). Historical Babylon “*will never again be inhabited, or dwelt in from generation to generation. As when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah with its neighbors ... no man will live there, nor will any man reside in it*” (Jer 50:39-40). Also look at Jeremiah 51, especially verses 25-26 and 60-64. So, Babylon of The Revelation is clearly symbolic for some great, dominant, prosperous - and immoral - society. Could that be the USA?

It is not abnormal to be drawn into end time studies. Most of us want to know the future - at least to some degree. When I asked God the following question, I had already been exposed to both Amillennialism and Premillennial Dispensationalism. These two are at odds with each other in some very substantive ways. But, rather than asking God for a full understanding of the whole end time scenario, I decided to narrow the request to just one little chunk. “*Father, if You would **just let me know** about America! That's all - just America!*” That seemed pretty humble to me. Soon afterward, I read this passage. “*It is not for you to know times and epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority*” (Acts 1:7). This was spoken by the risen Christ - near Jerusalem - to His eleven disciples/apostles. It is a historical account - not some directive to a 20th century, Gentile Christian in America ... me. Yet, to this day (40+ years later), that passage still lifts off the page and drowns out all surrounding clatter. He's the Teacher and I am the student. Maybe I was asking to learn calculus when He knew I needed to learn how to add. To yank this passage out of its context and apply it to myself is *clear-cut eisegesis*. However, I fully expect God will confirm, at The Judgment, He was behind this ... **legal** eisegesis. So, He moved me on to concentrate on other matters - like ... what you are reading :)

Another Personal Example

Another time, as a young Christian in south Florida, I found myself longing to leave the single life behind. When around my sisters in the Lord, I found myself easily ... diverted, you might say. Anyway, as I was riding the bus home from work one day, I was reading Jeremiah, and came across this verse. “*You shall not take a wife for yourself nor have sons and daughters in this place*” (Jer 16:2). That passage shot straight through me. I immediately reacted with great resistance. Actually, I got really mad. That is something I did not want to “*hear*.” In my years of experience ... I know that is often an indicator that God is behind the communicate ... to me. I am confident that God eisegeted that passage toward me that day - and that will be confirmed when I stand before Him. The result? By the time I had walked from the bus stop to home, I had yielded ... and that began a chapter of tremendous freedom. I did not entertain any future marriage relationship with any of my sisters in south Florida and related to them as - and only as - my sisters. God proceeded to fill my life with intense responsibilities the rest of those Florida days. Five years passed and when certain my next chapter was a Bible College in Mississippi, I let Him know I was leaving that “*place*.” Within a year I married ... and had children elsewhere. It's all history now. Again, this is *clear-cut eisegesis*. I am not Jeremiah in Israel awaiting the invasion and devastation by Nebuchadnezzar.

It is amazing to me how many times my entire life has been altered by words from

that Book. And what is even more amazing - while I often initially recoiled at what it said, any time I yielded, I have never looked back thinking it was a wrong turn. Indeed just the opposite. There is no question I have eisegeted the texts above. I could easily recite dozens of other instances. And just because these passages greatly influenced my life course, that doesn't prove anything. Ultimately, this matter will be settled between me and my Creator. The reason I am belaboring this point is because Christians engage in eisegesis regularly. They often feel God has spoken to them through His word – but even a cursory look at the cited passage shows it was obviously written to someone else in an entirely different historical setting. My point is that when such eisegesis produces results that do not conflict with some other part of the Bible, no one on the outside can know *for sure* if the eisegesis is legal or not. In the examples I shared above, I am content to wait until The Judgment to be vindicated - or reproved.

As far as God Himself being an eisegete ... this very thought might repulse you. But, your reaction will not stop Him if He is so inclined. His Old Testament uses in the New Testament have convinced me He has done this ... and can do this. He will never violate His words - but He can take His own words out of their context, and *legally* apply them to some outside situation any time He wants. While He does use His word exegetically, and we should always seek to gain that perspective ... He also uses it eisegetically. Consider, and work on this matter. Of course, there is ...

Illegal Eisegesis - “Out of Context”

Here is the simplest way to recognize illegal eisegesis. If the point being presented uses the Bible in a way *that violates a more basic* Bible declaration, then you are witnessing *illegal* eisegesis. The goal is to make the particular point authoritative by God - yet the actor is using God's own words *illegally*. Satan did this when he quoted Psalm 91:11,12 to Jesus. After having led Jesus to the top of the Temple, he said, “*If You are the Son of God, cast Yourself down from here, for it is written, 'He will give His angels charge concerning You, to guard you,' and 'On their hands they will bear You up, lest You strike Your foot against a stone.'*” Jesus refuted this. “*On the other hand, it is written, 'You shall not tempt the Lord your God'*” (Lk 4:9-11 and Mt 4:7). The verses Satan used were true, but Jesus came back with the more fundamental truth - thus exposing Satan's illegal eisegesis. He was using God's own words in the attempt to produce a sin action. Such activity is an extremely high crime.

People, and churches, do this when they start with a *decided* position (some doctrine/practice) and then point *toward* passages in an attempt to give it the air of God's authority. Again, what makes this “*illegal*” is when that pet doctrine or practice violates what God's word *actually does teach* on the particular matter. For example, this new cash “*tithe*” teaching is a perfect example. Often Malachi 3:7-12 is cited as the Christian (royal priest) is warned that if he/she fails to give 10% of their gross income to the local church for life ... they are “*robbing*” God. Of course, we know that no thief will enter the Kingdom of God (1Cor 5:10). But this new “*tithe*” teaching changes the content of the actual tithe from an owner's agriculture and husbandry gains from inside the promised land of the Jews - to cash money, which it never was. In fact, if Jesus would have presented 10% of his carpenter earnings as a “*tithe*” to God, this conversation we are now having would never have occurred. Jesus, as a Jew under the Law, would have

sinned by doing that, and I would be wandering around somewhere still lost in my sins. Unless He grew something or raised some animals that He owned, He never tithed. Also, for this new cash “*tithe*” teaching, “*the storehouse*” of Malachi is changed to the local church and also the recipients of this new cash *tithe* is changed from the Levites (and widows and orphans and aliens in certain years of the *tithe* cycle), to the local church. They then decide where your cash goes. And there are more changes they make to the *tithe* of the Bible (i.e., there never was a weekly *tithe*, or priests tithing to fellow priests). Some back off a bit and declare this 10% is a “*Biblical Principle*.” That means they have no actual Bible to back them up, but point from this outside-the-Bible-teaching to some Bible passages that have nothing to do with their invention. But fortunately, God does have instructions for the Christian and his/her cash. 1 Timothy 5:8 is exceedingly clear that the Christian’s first, and ongoing, financial ministry is a family provision mandate. Furthermore, Romans 13:8 (no debt) is another bedrock passage of each royal priest's financial ministry. This new “*tithe*” teaching hijacks the word “*tithe*,” - slaps all kinds of new things on it ... and then asserts that God Himself is the Authority behind this horrific invention. This will not end well for all involved in this false teaching. (Go to <https://freelygive-n.com> for the ebook “*No Tithe for the Christian*” and several other articles about the Christian and his/her money.)

There is much more that could be discussed about how we, as priests, are to relate to, and handle, God’s word. But, let’s move on to another couple points before concluding.

Priests - and God’s Use of Other People

You already know that God uses other people to impact us, encourage us, and challenge us. Concerning His use of other believers (fellow priests) isn’t that sort of the point behind the different giftings? Some teach, some help, some discern, etc., etc., etc. And when He uses people we already respect ... that can help us accept the input. But God can also use unsaved people to send us a message. My first year Greek instructor would say, “*I learned love by being around those who do not love. I learned graciousness by being around those who are not gracious ...*”. Experiencing the opposite of God’s ways ... can often be the best of teachers. But I am also certain God tests us ... by bringing some message to us through a person our pride and ego naturally dismisses. For example ...

When I was a young Christian, on staff at a Christian Drug and Alcohol Rehabilitation Center, a recovering client came to me with a challenge to our imposed, ministry-wide, Sabbath keeping policy. He put this passage in front of me: “*Let no one act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day - things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ*” (Col 2:16,17). He then asserted it wasn't right for us to place all kinds of rules on him, or the others, so as to “*keep the Sabbath as a day of rest*” - only allowing Bible pursuits. The preacher who was doctrinally behind this rehabilitation ministry ... was a “*giant*” in the faith, Dr. D. James Kennedy. He had thousands at his church every week, often spoke memorized Koine Greek from the pulpit, founded the worldwide Evangelism Explosion program, had a radio and television ministry ... and a recovering drunk was challenging this scholar - as well as the leadership and board of our

rehabilitation ministry? Was I to believe - this drunk - or all the spiritual authority over me? The answer is ... neither. The challenge before me was the same as it always has been - and always will be ... "*search the Scriptures*" and "*examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good*" (Jn 5:39 and 1Thes 5:21). In this instance, the recovering drunk was handling the Scriptures accurately. God used that passage as a gut punch and that began a search that soon encompassed the entire Law system and the Christian's relationship to it. Soon, it became clear the Presbyterian Church of America (PCA) was in grave error on the Mosaic Law - its place and purpose post-cross. Ultimately, I do not know if this fellow was saved or not. But, concerning my own self, all that mattered was ... would I listen, learn and live, or would I dismiss out-of-hand from disdain, self righteousness and superiority? This leads to the final point - a tangent from this story.

Denying One's Priesthood

Have you ever felt like you had something spiritually you wanted to share with someone, but were promptly rebuffed? If it turns out that God was indeed working in you to bring that message forward, here is what I think just happened. He wanted to use His priest (you) and that rebuff will be judged as *a denial of your priesthood*. While that person has indeed rejected you, in truth, what has been rejected is a message from God through His priest - so they have rejected Him. If I am correct about this, does this give you a glimpse of what will be part of the substance of Judgment Day? Think of all the times you have sought to reason with someone who is wayward in behaviors, in teachings and practices, only to have it fall on deaf ears with no inquiry as to the validity of your message. Will God forget that ... or will that be revisited at The Judgment?

How often God works through one of His priests to convey some message ... only He knows. But there are times the priest doesn't even know God is using him/her. One place I worked, that was a very spiritually active place, included a quiet woman who observed, more than engaged in, all the varied "*debates*." One day, she said to me, "*Of all the people who come through this place, you're the only one who has peace*." What she saw in what I did - or didn't do - or when she saw it, I have no idea. But what she did see was, "*...the wicked are like the tossing sea, for it cannot be quiet, and its waters toss up refuse and mud. 'There is no peace,' says my God, 'for the wicked.'*" (Isa 57:20-21). Conversely, what she sensed about me was, "*... the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus*" (Phil 4:7). The timing of all these matters are, fortunately, in His hands. He knows when to move, where to move, and how to move in piercing the sin veils moving all around us.

A common theme of this age, indeed one of its most defining characteristics, is its natural bent to dismiss God - His will, ways, priorities and communiques. The ultimate demonstration of this trait happened when He prepared a body for Himself (Heb 10:5) and entered human history in the person of the Christ. He even came into the nation He had chosen and to whom He had revealed Himself for a couple thousand years. But, those who should have been able to recognize Him, "*did not receive Him*" (Jn 1: 11). So, Israel's Rock (Deut 32:31) became ... The Rejected Stone. In light of this, what kind of response do you suspect might often await His priests?

But, haven't I, even as a Christian, balked at some communique from Him ... to me? As I mentioned earlier, one way I often know it is God communicating with me is

because of my initial reaction - recoil, anger, or saying, *“that isn’t what I want to hear right now.”* Why is this the case? Why the resistance? Well, the answer is really quite simple. *“... My thoughts are not your thoughts. Neither are your ways My ways,” declares the Lord. ‘For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts’”* (Isa 55:9-10). I have said in some of my videos ... this is the nicest way for God to say to me, *“Boy, You and I aren’t anything alike. We don’t think the same, act the same or react the same.”* He is going clockwise while I go counterclockwise. So, when the two collide, Who is actually right and Who is ultimately going to prevail? My point here is that it should not shock us too much if our priesthood to others is denied. We must guard against the same inclinations when the Great High Priest is messaging ... a lower priest - our own self.

Time after time, when I yield to God on some matter that I know He is communicating with me about - often an entire field of exciting truths open up before me. This money issue is a prime example. Go read my ebook and articles on this. Another example is the love topic. Another is the subject of death (and evolution claims). Or my materials on abortion. Vast fields of truth open before us when we respond positively to God’s communiques. This should not be surprising for a couple of reasons. First, a positive faith response by us ... does not go unnoticed by Him. In fact, it so pleases Him, that He then *“piles on”* - revealing many more reinforcing insights. Secondly, any area of truth is vast and wide and deep and always leads to liberty. His commandments are *“exceedingly broad”* (Psalm 119:96). And that is an exceedingly massive understatement. *“Oh the depth of His riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!”* (Ro 11:33). Don’t you want to experience more of that? It never gets old.

But getting back to a situation where our priesthood was denied/rebuffed ... is that the end of the matter? God *“has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead”* (Ac 17:31). No one escapes. But, concerning unbelievers, is that why God has brought them into our varied life journeys? While I know God can indeed use our dismissed message as additional judgment on those who remain unsaved and die in their sins ... I also know the Father did not send His Son into the world to damn it. It is already damned (see Jn 3:17-18). So, I trust God to *continue* the work He started when he brought me into an unbeliever’s life and that His mercy will ultimately triumph over His judgment (Ja 2:13). What Jesus accomplished through the cross is worthy of reward and He died to create a path for sinners to be put into right standing with God. That was the whole point. So, I don’t care when, why or how each one I touch gets saved - just that it happens before they exit this life. That gives me confidence to aggressively represent Him with as much wisdom as possible as I walk among those outside the faith (Col 4:5). So, with the unsaved, I don’t fret much when my priesthood is denied. That, I know, is very often ... the start of something big!

On the other hand, fellow believers who adopt such a posture (often even unwilling to grant us an audience), I think this is going to work out quite differently ... with some unpleasant surprises. This indifference/rejection simply means that the person keeps heading down that same, unaltered path. God warns every Christian to take care how he/she builds on the only valid foundation - which is Jesus Christ (Read 1Cor 3:10-15). It is right here I must declare one of the most fabulous things about

Christianity. Each person who comes into God's family comes in on the same grounds (Jesus' blood and His righteousness) and starts building his/her own Christian life *from scratch*. No one enters the family with some advantage in knowledge, wisdom or understanding. Each Christian begins building his/her own beliefs and practices ... and projects that representation into his/her world for the duration of this life. The warning is to build correctly on that foundation because it will either be rewarded by the Founder of the faith ... or rejected by Him. Think of it like this. He invented the Church and, as such, is sole Boss of the Church. He alone determines what is a valid representation of Himself and His interests ... and what is refuse. That is what the Believer's Judgment is about in Romans 14:1-12. He will expose when each wrong turn was made, when He sent corrective information and/or warning (including what priest He may have sent), and if that was not heeded, He alone will determine what fruit remains (if any) and what is burned up. His Kingdom does not grow, or expand, on error. But, the other side of this coin happens also. A wrong turn was made, He sent corrective information, and it was heeded. That Christian will fall on his/her face thanking Him as eternal fruit was borne - with its eternal rewards. Isn't that much preferred?

Through the years, The Lord has helped me immensely in sifting through and sorting out many topics and practices in the Christian faith. I feel very fortunate because I came pretty much as a blank slate. There was no church tradition I felt needed my fidelity and/or protection (*"because my Dad and Grandad were preachers in the particular sect,"* etc., etc., etc.) - so everything has been totally open for investigation. Looking back on my life, I am struck by the events and situations God orchestrated to bring certain matters to the forefront that then demanded my focus and investigation. And I have always had an innate understanding that my opinions hold no sway on whatever the truth is on any given topic. At the same time, I know Who does have all the answers, so at the start of any truth journey, He has heard something from me along these lines. *"I don't care what the truth is ... as long as I learn what the truth is."* And since He gave His Son to die for me, why would He refuse to teach me? Does he want dumb children running around down here? If you have children, you didn't hesitate answering that question. What would make you think our Father is any different? Whether fair or not, our children are a reflection on us to some degree. *"The Name of God is blasphemed (all day long) among the Gentiles because of you"* (Isa 52:4 and Ro 2:24). Do you think He wants ... a bunch of dumb priests parading around down here?

I think there are two primary keys for a Christian to be able to grow in the faith and in practice. First, we must *ask God* about the issue. *"One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers"* (Mt 23:8). How often is that key not even thought of - much less used? The second key is the request must be *genuinely sincere*. This second part only God can know for sure. But, one way we can know we actually were sincere is by this: if He does bring insight into our realm (truth) - we embrace it. We do not rationalize it away by seeking out other voices (our own or others) to back some preferred stance. We now live it. This is proof we really did want to know the truth - and it always leads to *"a change of mind without regret"* (2Cor 7:10). I have never regretted standing in truth, whether it required personal cost or not. Those consequences, one way or the other, have been an irrelevant concern. *"Wherever the tree falls, there it lies"* (Eccl 11:3). He is the One who makes sure we do not regret it. And this is how our priesthood becomes more and more

useful to God. Input *received* makes us an ever sharper two-edged threshing sledge that can be wielded with increasing utility in the fields around us (See Isa 41:15).

Now for a last point/story. Coming back to this “*tithe*” issue (as an example of a priesthood *often* denied), this new teaching started after churches could no longer tax everyone. The Bill of Rights in the newly formed Republic of the United States was the culprit. It was in that context, American Theologians “*rediscovered the tithe*” ... although wholly remade. This is one of the very few contributions American Theologians have been credited for in the academic discipline called, Systematic Theology. It was probably accepted in those ranks because as other countries adopted a similar posture of separating the government from religion ... a cash crisis ensued. We think because this teaching has permeated most of our churches for our entire life - that it is an *old* teaching. But, 1789? And this new “*tithe*” teaching, once rediscovered, was not enacted in a day. It took some time, and a lot of effort, to get this new teaching mainstream - especially with each element being redefined or totally ignored (like the tithe cycle). That is one reason its adherents are so aggressive about it and ignore, or attempt to destroy, any challenge to it. So, let me ask you this. How many “*tithe*” advocates do you think ... even know what I just shared about its “*rediscovery?*” Go get my “*Tithe Test*” and take it yourself - and then give it as a pop quiz to any “*tithe*” advocate in your circles - and let’s see how they score. It’s only 20 questions (<https://freelygive-n.com>). So, bottomline, not only did the entire New Testament never even hint at this invention, but very few times in the first 1800 years of the Church did the subject even arise. And if some “*theologian*” did try to make a case for a “*tithe*” on God’s people, it was dismissed immediately.

But, here is one thing I know without a doubt. Anyone - *everyone* - teaching this new “*tithe*” dung, he/she has never asked God about this matter. Never. This information is not hidden. Any royal priest can learn of the Christian’s financial ministry before God - and it is marvelous ... bursting with opportunities.

The last two churches I have been a part of have both taught this invented “*tithe*” teaching. In the first church (a large church), I had been attending for a short while when they announced a new season of small groups. I did not know what all the church actually believed on several issues, so on the submitted form I suggested they check out my website and if they did not want me in a group just to let me know. I then received a call by a staffer who said there were “*some concerns*” about my writings and positions. Rather than defend whatever the concerns were I said, “*I wrote on the application if you would prefer I not be in a small group that will be fine. I have no desire to cause problems in your church.*” I was later informed I was invited to a group of men and we started going through the prepared lessons. After a few weeks, the “*tithe*” issue came up by a fellow who said he and his girlfriend had just started “*tithing*” and felt so relieved to be out of God’s crosshairs. So, God was now at bay. When there was nodding of heads and consensus, as gently as I could (haha) I told the group this “*tithe*” teaching was a new teaching and every element about God’s real tithe was totally changed (except 10%), and this new thing is not required by God from His children. To my amazement, we actually had a real discussion about this. In the ensuing weeks, they kept bringing this up when it had nothing to do with the actual lessons we were in. I could tell the elder leading the group was beginning to question this whole matter and I made this proposal. “*Look, one of your main duties as an elder is ‘to refute those who contradict’ (Tit 1:9). If you*

want, go to the head pastor and tell him there is a guy in your group that is saying there is no tithe for the Christian and you are having a difficult time refuting him. And ask him to set up a meeting with me so he can refute me." The elder said, he would go himself because he agreed with me ... and then told me, *"You were assigned to me so I could keep an eye on you."* That elder then had several discussions with the head pastor and actually had some remarkable insights on previous statements the pastor had made from the pulpit which I had never heard. The small group wrapped up, and I actually began attending another church and I found out later the elder left the church as the pastor would not investigate this issue. I am sure other matters came up as well.

The next church I attended was relatively quiet about this topic. They did not even pass collection plate, so little was said about money. I was asked to do the message about once every six weeks, and normally would enhance some topic the pastor had preached on earlier. As time passed (I was there about 6 years), the pastor and main elder had probably looked my website over - so, they would talk to others about their need to tithe when I wasn't around. As some individuals began asking me about this, I told them not to worry about it - and I went to the main elder to let him know of the inquires and what I had said. They both continued to approach believers behind the scenes and at one point I told the elder that one of his main jobs *"was to refute those who contradict. And how are you supposed to refute me? By showing me how I am twisting the scriptures - so straighten me out."* My hope was ... to help him. But, he was unwilling. Not long after that another issue arose and after a real struggle, I knew my time there was done. But, I am still praying that if God still wants to use me in any of these men's lives, He will set that up by giving them enough unsettledness that they will know there is unfinished business here.

The point of this is not victimhood. It is not about a need to be right all the time ... or looking for a perfect church ... or being a passive aggressive armchair quarterback, etc., etc., etc. If any of that type of motive is present - I lose. But, if these individuals (who I really do think are genuine Christians) will be judged by the Lord as having denied my priesthood (even unwilling to examine why I hold such a position as well as forwarding God's actual demands upon the Christian's cash) - they will lose. The Lord alone will decide what He accepts - or burns up - from that point on. I am completely out of this matter between a Christian and the Lord Himself. And I also know this. If the Lord validates my appeals and my subsequent actions were actually from Him - each of these men will be very unhappy with themselves for their avoidance, attacks and determination to proceed down an errant fire-ending path. My goal has never been to persuade the unpersuadable, but to be used by God to be of benefit to His children so God can use them more in the expansion of His kingdom. What God does require of us I hope to forward with all clarity, but I refuse to require things of His children that He does not - in teachings or in practices. One thing I am positive about - these men never asked God what He thinks about this *"tithe"* or God's directives for each fellow priests handling of his/her money and/or possessions. They did not ask Him! This material is not hidden.

Conclusion

As a Christian, you are already in this Royal Priesthood ... this very second. There are no hoops you must jump through and no validation needed from any man. This role is

foundational to one's relationship with God Almighty. Ask God for more understanding of who you are in Him and how to responsibly conduct yourself in this role. Let Him know you want to accurately represent Him to the world He calls you into ... to as His priest! Do you think He would be interested in responding to such a request? This will build what I call a *life confidence*. A person cannot be stationed to a more important post. This is the pinnacle living position for anyone in this age.

It is critical that we bring our questions to God, learn what is correct and if we are sure God had indeed taught us (with His word rightly handled as the primary source), then we must live that. Otherwise, will He teach us more if we are going to pick and choose what we want? And if there are areas where we still don't know for sure what is right, it is okay to say, *"I don't know."* And it is even better if we can then explain the varied positions without committing with absolute conviction to any camp. I have done this often - particularly on end times matters and some of the divorce/remarriage scenarios. I still might forward which way I am leaning, and why, but then add, *"I could be wrong. I am still working through it."* The goal is for us to grow as Christians - as priests - so we can be ever more useful to the High Priest.

There is a preacher from the Philippines who has contacted me several times on varied issues (he started with this *"tithing"* issue and of recent has moved to baptism questions and end times scenarios). He started sending me photos of gatherings he organizes - feeding and then Bible teaching. He asks for prayer for his listeners as well as strength, encouragement, open doors and continued provision for himself. He has never asked for any money. In these photos, the living conditions are marginal at best, and the individuals with whom he is working most assuredly have limited prospects in the current economic structures in which they find themselves. As I have now revised this article, I kept thinking of them. I wish I could tell them, *"Would you like to live an incredibly important life? Come to the Lord, get your sin problem resolved and He will declare you righteous and appoint you as His royal priest. You will then embark on a life where every second matters. You will continually be bringing things to God for His attention and action, and He will also use you as He reaches out to the world in which you move. There is no higher purpose anyone can find."* That is the truth.

Do not let anyone demean this office which was purchased for you by Jesus - with His own blood. Start by rejecting any thought that you are *"a layman in secular work."* There is no such thing as a lay-priest, or lay-royal priest. Not only is such a designation completely anti-Bible, it is also a word construction of nonsense. Additionally, every Christian is instructed *"whatever you do, do all to the glory of God"* (1Cor 10:31). *"Glory"* carries the idea of *"honor."* We are to honor God in all our activities. That includes manual labor which He calls, *"the good thing"* (Eph 4:28). What He calls good - is good - not *"secular"* (Definition: *"attitudes or activities or other things that have no religious or spiritual basis."*). There is no such thing as *"secular work"* for the priests of God. We will account to Him for everything done in the body, *"whether good or bad"* at the Judgment (2Cor 5:10). That means we are in a continual state of ministry and everything is ministry - everything is service - to Him. Do not be found among those who have desecrated this gift by their teachings and church practices. Jesus secured this office/role/post for each of His brethren - *by His own blood*. Who strips that, defaces that, undermines that ... and comes out okay?

Footnote 1

John 20:23 states, *“If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained.”* Quite honestly, I am not sure what to make of this statement. I think this statement by Jesus to his apostles may somehow be *for them*. But, why wouldn't they just forgive everybody? Preach to people, pray for people - and then pick which ones they wanted in heaven, or hell, for eternity? I am obviously missing something here. For me personally, I do not think I have the power to forgive sins that are against God Himself. David affirms that even though he committed adultery with Bathsheba and then had her husband, Uriah, the Hittite, murdered in a despicable plot - yet, when confronted he said, *“Against You, You only, I have sinned and done what is evil in Your sight”* (Ps 51:4). God Himself is the One who must be appeased ... and I can dictate that to Him? Furthermore, why would a forgiven sinner *“retain the sins”* of some other fellow sinner? A Saul on the warpath became the Apostle Paul. A debauchery infested young man was changed to writing an article like this. God makes new creations. What if Hitler had become saved in the middle of World War 2? Would that have changed anything? So, why not just declare, *“I forgive all the sins of everybody”* and then go on our way? Bottomline, as His priests, I do not think we are in the sin mediation business. We can ask God to do that for someone - even *beg Him* to extend mercy to individuals in our circle - but we are not able to inject ourself into that transaction with some sort of fix for them. This rests between each person and the Lord Himself.

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