

As the Scriptures repeatedly declare, many who experience God’s goodness are mercifully redeemed to praise the Lord Jesus Christ and offer their lives in spiritual sacrifice to God. You are saved from this proud and evil world to serve in God’s evangelical ministry to be the life of the world for his glory.

Introduction – Have you ever wondered what kind of Christian God wants you to be? Peter gives us seven characteristics of a Christian priest, all of which turn out to be the major defining characteristics of classic evangelical Christianity.

Background – The apostle Peter addresses his epistle to the “elect exiles” of Asia Minor. These were Jewish but mostly Gentile Christians far away from their spiritual home in Jerusalem. Hence they wondered if they were overlooked in God’s redemptive plan for the world, and thus struggled with their identity, purpose, and call as Christians on the outskirts of the kingdom. Did God have any use for them?

I. Being: What God’s Priest Is

A. #1 Instinctively craves for God as a redeemed worshiper (vv. 2-3, 9-10)

1. *One who has personally tasted the Lord’s goodness and therefore craves more of him through pure spiritual nourishment.* Christians must be addicted to God and therefore to his “pure spiritual milk.” The gospel truths of God’s Word (1 Peter 1:23-25) will cause them to grow up in faith into a mature salvation, because pure spiritual milk is undiluted, high-octane gospel power for healthy growth. The Greek word often translated “spiritual” is *logikos* which is related to and echoes the “word” (*logos*; cf. 1 Peter 1:23) yielding a translation of something like “logical,” “rational,” “reasonable,” “thoughtful.” The idea conveyed is of depth, richness, and fullness. Christians who know they are God’s priests will continue to long for the richness God’s Word if they have first tasted that the Lord is good (Psalm 34:8).

2. *One who praises the mercies of God from a position of sanctified missional identity.* People who believe in Jesus are privileged to be counted by God as members of his chosen, precious people. Only because of God’s grace which grafts us into the very life of Christ. What an amazing privilege for those of us who aren’t Jews to be included in the blessed inheritance of Abraham’s children! Christians are also a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and God’s special possession (cf. Exodus 19:5-6). In the ancient world, a god’s priests were expected to be set apart for service to that god. Likewise, all Christians as the Lord’s priests are set apart for his service. Through their praises, priests worship God not only in thanksgiving for what he has done, but also worships God for who he is in himself. Praise moves from declaring in worship the works of God to the worship of glorifying the name of God. Such instinct is not natural for any person with a fallen nature, but the instinct is supernatural for all of God’s redeemed worshipers.

B. #2 Primally fears being offended at Christ (vv. 7b-8)

One who shudders at the possibility of falling away from Christ through hardened unbelief leading to disobedience. Peter, the disciple who on the night Jesus was betrayed had denied him three times, this same chastened but restored disciple quotes the Old Testament (Psalm 118:22; Isaiah 8:14) which refers to the time when Israel’s king would be rejected and despised. It’s a horrifying prediction of those builders who reject Jesus and his claims on their lives. It was the Jewish leaders and chief priests who on Palm Sunday began conspiring to lead their people in rebellion against the Christ. But as a result of their tragic rejection of Jesus they stumbled and fell on the rock of offence which is actually the all-important cornerstone of God’s plan. For the redeemed worshipping priest who craves God and his Word, the thought of being counted among those who were offended at Jesus is terrifying. Why? Because he loves Christ above all, and lives to praise him.

II. Doing: What God's Priest Does

A. #3 Passionately fights indwelling sin as one loved by God (vv. 1, 11)

One who hates and crucifies within himself the evil that betrays Christ and hurts others. The new life of the Christian must reflect the character of our heavenly Father. Holiness is the duty and necessity of not only new Christians, but all Christians. That is why Peter urges believers to rid themselves of all the sins he lists: malice, deceit, hypocrisy, and slander (cf. Ephesians 4:22-24). All of these vices cause trouble and strife in the church, and are the opposite of what a priest is supposed to do: bring peace, unity, and reconciliation between man and man, and God and man.

B. #4 Spiritually sacrifices to God in union and communion with the church universal (v. 5)

One who gives his life as a spiritual sacrifice to Christ for the privilege of being a small but vital part of God's priestly people. Offering sacrifices is usually the first thing people imagine as the job of a priest. Protestants believe the Bible clearly teaches Jesus' death on the cross was the final perfect sacrifice for sin (Hebrews 4:14-16; 9:22-28; Jude 24-25). Thus any more sacrifices offered for sin are unnecessary and insulting to the sufficiency of the Cross. The Bible still gives a prominent place to priests offering sacrifices. But not blood sacrifices that atone for sin because Christ has completed that work. Rather the sacrifices priests continue to offer are spiritual in nature (Hebrews 10:20-25).

C. #5 Joyfully evangelizes through word and deed as a sojourning exile (vv. 9-10, 12)

One who lives to show/tell the world of his conversion from darkness and exclusion to light and belonging. Christians as priests are called to bring others to Jesus, to represent people before God, to be his holy ambassadors pleading with all to be reconciled to God (2 Corinthians 5:18-21). To everyone Christians must joyfully declare that those who trust in Jesus as the Savior of sinners are called into the kingdom of God's Son (Colossians 1:13). They are now children of the light and no longer in darkness (Acts 26:18; 1 Thessalonians 5:4; cf. WCF 16.2). The passages Peter quotes from Hosea are fulfilled in the church. The church today, composed of redeemed Jews and Gentiles, is to God and the world what Old Testament Israel was meant to be—a kingdom of priests.

III. Believing: How to Become God's Priest

A. #6 Repentantly scorn the rejection of the proud and their worldly shame (vv. 4, 6-7)

One who gladly bears the world's shame as a spiritual exile. Since Jesus was "rejected by men," so his followers will also experience the same kinds of rejection, exclusion, derision, persecution, and suffering. These are awfully hard burdens to bear, even for strong people. No one in their right mind pursues the hardships of exile. Yet repentance replies, "So be it." How can that be? Only by faith.

B. #7 Faithfully come to the living, chosen, precious cornerstone: Jesus Christ (vv. 4, 6-7)

One who is honored to align his whole life with the precious life of the resurrected Jesus. Drawing near to Jesus begins with repentance and faith, and these continue as the basics of constant fellowship with Christ. There is a God-given honor that accompanies worldly shame when you come to Jesus. When you see Jesus in the same way that God the Father sees his one and only Son, as his chosen and precious one who surpasses the worth of all others, then believing in him and serving in his priesthood will become worth all the rejection and shame the world can ever heap on you.

Conclusion – Accept that God has chosen and commissioned you to minister by faith. As a Christian, the Bible calls your ministry a priestly service. That's what it means to be, in the classic sense of the term, an evangelical Christian. What kind of Christian does God want you to be? Listen to how the epistle of 1 Peter elaborates (1 Peter 2:13-17; 3:8-12). Do you hear God's answer? "Christian, you are God's priest."