

## *The Priesthood of All Believers in Action*

Scripture is rich on the subject of the priesthood of all believers.<sup>1</sup> I start with what we have already seen from Romans. Having spoken of the believer's 'spiritual worship', Paul, with no delay, raised the practical application of the priesthood which all believers have in Christ:

For as we have many members in one body, but all members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives... I... am confident concerning you, my brethren, that you also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another (Rom. 12:3-8; 15:14).

This was not the only church to which Paul wrote about the subject. Far from it:

I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus, that you were enriched in everything by him in all utterance and all knowledge... so that you come short in no gift... There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all... God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as he pleased (1 Cor. 1:4-7; 12:1-31, especially 4-7,18; see also 1 Cor. 14:1-40).

Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God, who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant (2 Cor. 3:5-6).

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<sup>1</sup> For more on the topic, see my *The Priesthood*.

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Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling-place of God in the Spirit... To each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift... for the equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ... from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love... Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers... Be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another in the fear of God (Eph. 2:19-22; 4:7-16,29; 5:18-21).

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him (Col. 3:16-17).

Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing (1 Thess. 5:11).

Peter also:

As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious. Coming to him as a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ... As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to

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whom belong the glory and the dominion for ever and ever.  
Amen (1 Pet. 2:2-5; 4:10-11).

And then Jude:

You, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. And on some have compassion, making a distinction; but others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh (Jude 20-23).

Is this not proof enough that Scripture is rich on the priesthood of all believers? Does this weight of evidence not show that Hebrews 10:24-25 (properly understood) should be the norm for the *ekklēsia*?

Each believer is given grace for the ‘mutual edification’ of themselves and other believers (Rom. 14:19): all of them are given grace to be able to ‘edify another’, to be ‘competent to instruct one another’ (Rom. 15:14), to be ‘able... to admonish one another’, to ‘encourage each other’ (1 Thess. 4:18), to ‘comfort one another’, to ‘encourage one another and build each other up’ (1 Thess. 5:11), to ‘comfort each other, and edify one another’, to ‘warn... encourage... help’ (1 Thess. 5:14), to ‘warn... comfort... uphold’ fellow-believers.<sup>2</sup>

If I may pick just one verse from the above, may I stress: ‘Therefore comfort *each other* and edify *one another*, just as in fact you also are doing’ (1 Thess. 5:11)? Could Paul say this to the majority of believers in the majority of churches today? I especially note the ‘just as you also are doing’. Paul was not dealing in theories; his ‘just as you also are doing’ proves that; not ‘just as you used to do’; not ‘just as you once did’; not ‘just as you would like to do’; but ‘just as you also *are* doing’. This is the New Testament *ekklēsia* that Christ set up!<sup>3</sup>

Even when believers are engaged in singing, the stress is still on mutual edification, all the believers engaged in teaching each

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<sup>2</sup> See also Rom. 15:2; 1 Cor. 14:3-5,26; 2 Cor. 1:4; Eph. 4:25-29.

<sup>3</sup> See my *Pastor; The Priesthood*.

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other by word, by speaking (Eph. 5:18-21; Col. 3:16-17). The emphasis is certainly not on the music, whether instrumental or vocal!<sup>4</sup> Nor is it that the majority watch and listen to a handful of (semi or fully professional) singers. All sing, and all must sing with edification in mind. When this breaks down – as it so often does – singing becomes a performance, a performance which can so easily descend into an entertainment, even sensual entertainment.<sup>5</sup> What a thought! When it comes to singing, the words – the doctrine – aimed for the edification of one and all must be paramount for believers. In this way, and only in this way, does it lead to the glory of God.

Incidentally, neither of those two passages (Eph. 5:18-21; Col. 3:16-17) are concerned with ‘meetings’; in both cases, the context is heavily engaged with daily living. I am not saying that believers do not – or cannot or should not – sing for mutual edification when they meet – of course not! – but the fact is Paul wrote as he did about the practice while he was calling for a life of obedience to Christ:

Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ... wives... husbands... children... fathers... bondservants... masters... (Eph. 5:15 – 6:9).

Not a meeting in sight!

In addition to plain teaching on the priesthood of all believers in Scripture, spot the many indirect references to it. Here is a case in point:

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<sup>4</sup> How easy it is to mistake an emotional response to music for a spiritual experience.

<sup>5</sup> Some evangelical ‘worship services’ differ little from discos.

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By grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them (Eph. 2:8-10).

In this context, telling believers that they are God's 'workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works', is tantamount to telling them that they are priests. How? Notice that it is not long after saying the above that the apostle is talking to the Ephesians – *the Ephesians*, I repeat, mostly non-Jews – about Israel, and using expressions such as being 'brought near... access... a holy temple in the Lord... boldness and access with confidence'. Can there be any doubt that Paul had in mind the new-covenant fulfilment of the old-covenant priesthood? *All* believers are priests, they *all* have priestly obligations laid upon them, they *all* have sacrifices to offer.

And so, the old-covenant promise of God to Israel at Sinai – 'You shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation' (Ex. 19:6) – comes to its full new-covenant expression in believers:

You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy (1 Pet. 2:9-10).

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen (Rev. 1:5-6).

Worthy are you [Lord Jesus] to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth (Rev. 5:9-10).

Behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud

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voice: ‘Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!’ And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and ‘worshipped’ God, saying: ‘Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honour and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen’. Then one of the elders addressed me, saying: ‘Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?’ I said to him: ‘Sir, you know’. And he said to me: ‘These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore they are before the throne of God, and ‘serve’ him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes’ (Rev. 7:9-17).

Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years (Rev. 20: 6).<sup>6</sup>

Before I move on, I must repeat that all believers need constant, consistent and continual teaching, teaching which is designed (or ought to be designed) to prepare and encourage every believer to engage in ‘the ministry’. This ‘work of the ministry’ is something *all* the saints are to do. It is not something reserved for elders or deacons; certainly it is not confined to an ‘ordained’ minister.<sup>7</sup> It is something every believer engages in for the mutual good of all other believers. Let me repeat the important extract, with a vital improvement in translation:

To each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift... to equip his people for works of service [better than ‘for the equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry’], for the edifying of the body of Christ [or, ‘so that the body of Christ may be built up’]... from whom the whole body,

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<sup>6</sup> See Peterson pp261-282.

<sup>7</sup> See the following note.

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joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love... Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers (Eph. 4:7-16,29).

This clearly speaks of the all-body ministry, contrary to D.Martyn Lloyd-Jones, who, on Ephesians 4:12, declared:

Some argue that it means ‘for the doing of “service”’, that our Lord has set all these offices in the church in order that we may all be rendered fit or ‘furnished out for’ the doing of our ‘service’, whatever that service may be. Some contend that it means that the apostle is saying that all these offices are designed to enable us as members of the body to ‘serve’ one another. But it seems to me that this is quite untenable as an exposition... [Although] there is a sense in which this is true, [Lloyd-Jones grudgingly conceded, Paul] is not thinking of the ordinary, average members of the church... He is emphasising that the Lord has appointed a form and order of ministry in the... church. That is the entire context; and he includes those, and only those, who hold ministerial offices. Indeed, in the New Testament this word for ‘ministry’ is generally used in that sense and connotation.

With respect, the facts do not support this assertion. And this is putting it kindly; Lloyd-Jones was very wide of the mark; in truth, he could not have been more wrong! The context *does* favour the view that Paul was speaking of the ministry of the entire church; note the repeated emphasis – ‘each one... the whole body... every joint... every part’. He was not speaking of ‘the ministerial office’ as distinct from the so-called ‘average members’. How derogatory can one get! This is what clericalism leads to! Lloyd-Jones had left the word of God at this point and adopted the error of the Fathers. The New Testament does not ‘generally’ talk about ‘ministry’ in terms of ‘the ministerial office’. Ministry means ‘service’, the ‘service’ of every saint. Lloyd-Jones was advocating, instead of the priesthood of all believers, each believer, every believer, the priesthood of a few, select believers, all male.

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He went on to emphasise his – the common, the misconceived – idea of ‘ministers’, reading it into the passage, by saying Christ:

...has ordained and appointed them... ministers of the church [to do] what ministers do in the church Sunday by Sunday.

Lloyd-Jones drove home the point:

Let no one think that this subject is only appropriate for a theological seminary or for a gathering of ministers, and that it has nothing to do with members of the church who are not called into the ministerial office. This matter is important for all church members, for this good reason, that far too often the pew has controlled the pulpit, and great harm has come in the church... So it is important that every member of the church should have a true conception of the church and the office of the ministry in particular.<sup>8</sup>

In other words, Lloyd-Jones wanted believers to know his doctrine so that ‘the minister’ could be confirmed in his unbiblical position, leaving Christendom even more deeply entrenched.

As I say, how wrong could he be! But the fact is, Lloyd-Jones (knowingly or otherwise) was only following in the footsteps of Calvin.

Let me explain. While, without the slightest hint of patronisation, I freely admit that Calvin did much good, we must not be blinded to the way, with his medieval thinking, he set in concrete a terrible confusion of the covenants; The damage this has caused has been immense; it continues unabated to this day. In particular, in his *Institutes*, arguing from Ephesians 4:10-13, he made some astounding – incredible – claims:

We see that God, who might perfect his people in a moment, chooses not to bring them to manhood in any other way than by the education of the Church. We see the mode of doing it expressed: the preaching of celestial doctrine is committed to pastors. We see that all [men] without exception are [that is, in practice as well as (Calvin would say) in Scripture, all men

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<sup>8</sup> Lloyd-Jones: *Ephesians 4* pp199-201.



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should be] brought into the same order, that they may with meek and docile spirit allow themselves to be governed by teachers appointed for this purpose.

This is nothing short of a Reformed popery! Even so, Calvin had not finished:

Isaiah had long before given this as the characteristic of the kingdom of Christ: 'My Spirit that is upon you, and my words which I have put in your mouth, shall not depart out of your mouth, nor out of the mouth of your seed, nor out of the mouth of your seed's seed, says the LORD, from henceforth and for ever' (Isa. 59:21).

Before we look at what Calvin made of this, what do you think Isaiah was prophesying? I am convinced that Isaiah (Isa. 59:21) was speaking about the days of the new covenant, primarily of Christ, then the apostles (see John 14:7; 16:1-5), then all believers, and speaking with a similar voice to Isaiah 44:3; 54:13; Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 35:26-27; John 6:45; Hebrews 8:8-13; 10:16, and 1 John 2:20-21,27; namely, that God would endow his Son, then the apostles, and then all the saints with his Spirit, giving them his infallible, unalterable, eternal word.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> The difference between infallible apostolic utterance and preaching upon that infallible utterance can be seen in Paul's words to the Thessalonians: 'We had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God... Our appeal... Just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts. For we never came with words of flattery... We exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you... We also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers' (1 Thess. 2:1-13). When he was delivering revelation, he was above question; when he was preaching on that revelation, he was subject to scrutiny (Act 17:11). No man delivers revelation today; preaching must be – can only be – discourse on the revealed inerrant word of God. This why I restrict my use of 'message' to revelation. I don't give a 'message'; I preach the 'message'.

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What did Calvin make of it? Remember, he was quoting Isaiah 59:21 as proof of his claim that in the days of the new covenant ‘the preaching of celestial doctrine is committed to pastors’. Putting all this together, it is clear that Calvin was asserting that God puts his infallible, unalterable, eternal word into the mouth of ordained men in the Church; namely, the clergy. Consequently, without exception, all men – ‘average’ believers – ‘with meek and docile spirit [must] allow themselves to be governed by [this clergy – those] teachers appointed for this purpose’.<sup>10</sup>

What if they don’t? Calvin:

Hence it follows, that all who reject the spiritual food of the soul divinely offered to them by the hands of the Church, deserve to perish of hunger and famine.

This, once again, is nothing less than Reformed popery!

It gets worse! What? Yes, indeed! Having plunged into the old covenant with such a cavalier disregard for the discontinuity of the covenants – he was really setting up a Reformed sacramental, not to say sacerdotal, priesthood – Calvin went on to argue that the buildings in which pastors deliver their infallible, pulpit utterances are thereby made sacred, as sacred as the temple was in the old covenant!<sup>11</sup> In the following, do not miss the way

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<sup>10</sup> How Calvin could speak in such terms about the clergy is, to say the least, baffling! After all, the relevant passages speak of ‘the seed’, all believers, having the inward teaching spoken of, having the anointing, and 1 John actually speaks of saints standing in no need of a teacher! See the previous chapter for more on this. Incidentally, Albert Barnes in his *Commentary* on Isa. 59:21 made some amazing claims for the children of believers (the ‘seed’), not least the children of clergymen! I am, of course, not denying that God appoints able teachers in the *ekklēsia*, but the new-covenant doctrine is far removed (very far removed) from Calvin’s dictum.

<sup>11</sup> If it is objected that Calvin did not actually say so here, I point out three things in reply, three things which are inevitably linked. *First*, Calvin’s underlying theological presupposition led him to argue that Israel was the old-covenant church under the law, while the *ekklēsia* is the new-covenant equivalent or ‘gospel church’. The two form one

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Calvin repeated the mistake of the Fathers, time and again inserting the old covenant into the *ekklēsia*:

With this view, it pleased [God] in ancient times [that is, in the days of the old covenant] that sacred meetings should be held in the sanctuary, that consent in faith might be nourished by doctrine proceeding from the lips of the priest. Those magnificent titles, as when the temple is called God's rest, his sanctuary, his habitation, and when he is said to dwell between the cherubims (Ps. 132:13-14; 80:1), are used for no other purpose than to procure respect, love, reverence, and dignity to the ministry of heavenly doctrine.

And so on. But what of today? Calvin:

The treasure offered to us in earthen vessels is of inestimable value (2 Cor. 4:7).

What did Calvin mean? Was he saying that believers have the treasure of the infallible word of God delivered to them through ministers? Indeed, he was:

God himself appears and, as the author of this ordinance [that is, of preaching ministers through whom he proclaims his infallible word], requires his presence to be recognised in his own institution. Accordingly... he will never leave [believers] without prophets. For, as he did not commit his ancient people to [instruction by] angels, but raised up teachers on the earth to perform a truly angelical office, so he is pleased to instruct us in the present day by human means. But as anciently he did not confine himself to the [written] law merely, but added priests as interpreters, from whose lips the people might inquire after his true meaning, so in the present day he would not only have us to be attentive to reading [Scripture for ourselves], but has appointed masters to give us their assistance. In this there is a twofold advantage. For, on the one hand, he by an admirable test proves our obedience *when we listen to his ministers just as we would to himself*; while, on the other hand, he consults our

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church. This is not only wrong, it leads to the kind of damage I am speaking of here (see my '*A Gospel Church*'). *Secondly*, in light of that, his words quoted above are dynamite. *Thirdly*, it will not do to trot out the usual escape clauses which those who follow Calvin are so readily prone to do (see my *Christ, Infant*).

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weakness in being pleased to address us after the manner of men by means of interpreters, that he may thus allure us to himself, instead of driving us away by his thunder.<sup>12</sup>

In other words, according to Calvin, God requires believers to ‘listen to his ministers just as [they] would to himself’.<sup>13</sup> Phew!<sup>14</sup> And, lest anybody should object that I am making too much of all this, do not forget that Calvin was explicit that his last word on any subject must be taken from his *Institutes*.<sup>15</sup>

As another example of arguing black is white on this score, thus maintaining Christendom practice, take the teaching of Peter Masters on:

When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a [language], or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up (1 Cor. 14:26).

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<sup>12</sup> John Calvin: *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 4.1.5, emphasis mine.

<sup>13</sup> If so, what do believers do when ministers contradict each other?

<sup>14</sup> For more on this section on Calvin, see Jeremy Thomson: *Preaching as Dialogue: Is the Sermon a Sacred Cow?*, Grove Books, Cambridge, 2003, pp10-11.

<sup>15</sup> Calvin: ‘My object in this work was to prepare and train students of theology for the study of the Sacred Volume, so that they might both have an easy introduction to it, and be able to proceed in it, with unflinching step, seeing I have endeavoured to give such a summary of religion in all its parts, and have digested it into such an order as may make it not difficult for anyone, who is rightly acquainted with it, to ascertain both what he ought principally to look for in Scripture, and also to what head he ought to refer whatever is contained in it. Having thus, as it were, paved the way, I shall not feel it necessary, in any *Commentaries* on Scripture which I may afterwards publish, to enter into long discussions of doctrines or dilate on common places, and will, therefore, always compress them. In this way the pious reader will be saved much trouble and weariness, provided he comes furnished with a knowledge of the present work as an essential prerequisite’ (Calvin: *Institutes* pp21-22, ‘The Epistle to the Reader’ in the Strasbourg 1539 edition).

Masters dismissed as ‘absurd’ the view of those who ‘crazily’ understand Paul’s ‘each one’, ‘every one of you’, to mean that the apostle was addressing all the church:

When Paul says everyone had a psalm, doctrine, tongue [that is, a language], *etc.*, for ‘worship’, he obviously [really? – DG] refers to the recognised leaders of the church, as we prove [does he? – DG] here.<sup>16</sup>

According to Masters, Paul was addressing the handful of men ‘on the platform’ – ‘apostles, pastors, teachers, elders’ – not the entire number of believers; furthermore, he was categorical that those who ‘crazily’ hold the ‘absurd’ view are ‘contradicting the whole ethos of the New Testament’.

Staggering! Please read again the massive amount of material I have quoted from Scripture, material which leaves no room for doubt but that the mutual, all-body, members-one-of-another edification of each and every believer was the norm, the practice, for the *ekklēsia* in those early days. Masters was guilty of *eisegesis* – that is, starting with a presupposition, an assumption, reading it into the text, and then reading it out; he explicitly admitted as much at one point: ‘I am reading into the passage’, he said. The truth is, he was driving a coach and horses through Scripture to maintain his concept of a Christendom church.

What is more, according to Masters, in a letter ‘to the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints’ (1 Cor. 1:2), a letter to the whole *ekklēsia*, Paul was rebuking those ‘on the platform’ – ‘apostles, pastors, teachers, elders’ – for producing near-bedlam<sup>17</sup> at Corinth, and telling them to get a grip on themselves. Interesting idea!<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Peter Masters: ‘True “Worship”’, a sermon preached on 27th May 2012; see also Jonathan Northern: ‘A Word to “Worship” Leaders’, a sermon preached on 6th May 2021, in which he spoke of the ‘each one’ as referring to ‘the platform party’, citing Masters in support.

<sup>17</sup> ‘The term “bedlam” comes from the name of a hospital in London, “Saint Mary of Bethlehem”, which was devoted to treating the mentally ill in the 1400s. Over time, the pronunciation of “Bethlehem” morphed

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Incidentally, one of Masters' arguments was 'the thousand' in 'attendance' at Corinth. Where did he get that figure?

Why oh why can we not let Scripture be Scripture, and make good our vehement and frequent boast that we take Scripture to be our authority in all doctrine and practice?

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Let Frank Viola sum up the biblical position:

The only sustaining force of the early church gathering was the life of the Holy Spirit. The early Christians were clergy-less, liturgy-less, programme-less and ritual-less. They relied entirely on the spiritual life of the individual members to maintain the church's existence and the quality of their gatherings.<sup>19</sup>

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With all that in mind, let us get down to my chapter title – the priesthood of all believers *in action*; that is, Hebrews 10:24-25 in practical terms.

In the words of Hebrews 10:24-25, all the saints – not just a handful – are to think how they might improve their contribution to the mutual stirring up and encouragement of all the other believers – putting backbone into one another: 'Let us – the writer and his readers, all of them – consider how...'. Do not mistake the writer's use of 'let us'. There is nothing weak about this phrase; it does not represent a piece of cheery, wishful thinking on the part of one who was hoping to jolly his readers along, but it has all the force of a command. Moreover, since the writer had in mind the coming day – the judgment day – then it obviously follows – with the passage of nearly 2000 years – this

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into 'bedlam' and the term came to be applied to any situation where pandemonium prevails' (vocabulary.com).

<sup>18</sup> Possible, of course, but, if so, why didn't Paul do the same as he did in Galatia, where he named Peter and Barnabas (Gal. 2:11-14)?

<sup>19</sup> Frank Viola: *Re-imagining Church: Pursuing the Dream of Organic Christianity*, David C.Cook, Colorado Springs, 2008, p63.

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command must be even more pressing for us than for his original readers.

And when the writer urges his readers to ‘consider’, he means them to ‘consider closely, attentively, thoughtfully, carefully’; in other words, they must give very serious thought to this business, it is of such importance.

Of course only the Spirit can enable saints to do all this. Moreover, there are dangers – hence the apostolic warnings and teaching on the subject (1 Cor. 14:1-40; Gal. 5:26; Phil. 2:3-4, and so on). True, it is much safer, far easier, to fall in with Christendom’s institutional Churchianity. But which is going to rule the roost – Christendom or Scripture? Read Matthew 15:1-20. And this is one of the reasons behind God’s gift of elders to his people – so that by their loving governance of the *ekklēsia* they will be able to bring out the best in his people in educating, disciplining, caring for, nurturing them, and all to enable them to nurture themselves and one another. Hence the many apostolic instructions to believers – elders and the rest – as to their respective duties and responsibilities. In the institutional system, one instruction would seem to cover it: ‘Keep attending, keep listening (or, at least, appear to be), and don’t rock the boat’.

The principle of the new covenant is that sinners are converted, added to the *ekklēsia*, and so be instructed in Christ’s law (Matt. 28:18-20; Acts 2:41-42) to live in the constant ‘worship’ of God.

Christendom (reducing attendees to the role of observers of a performance) robs believers of the experience of mutual edification and encouragement through participation.

In short, believers, under the new covenant, do not wait until they reach the meeting house in order to ‘worship’. The fact is, the notion of ‘switching on’ worship as we cross the threshold of some building, and ‘switching it off’ as we leave, is repugnant in new-covenant terms. *It is far from unknown, however.* This Christendom attitude ought not to be! Believers, in essence, should be no different inside the meeting house than outside.

## *The Priesthood of All Believers in Action*

They are always priests, always ‘on duty’, and always offering their sacrifices to God through Christ:

By him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God; that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to his name (Heb. 13:15).

We are told to ‘pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks’ (1 Thess. 5:17-18). Paul declared that he and his friends ‘pray always’ (2 Thess. 1:11). As he said to Timothy: ‘I desire... that... men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting’ (1 Tim. 2:8). Even in the days of the old covenant, God promised that under the new covenant he would establish perpetual worship from his priests throughout the earth:

From the rising of the sun, even to its going down, my name shall be great among the Gentiles; in every place, incense shall be offered to my name, and a pure offering; for my name shall be great among the nations, says the LORD of hosts... He [Christ] will purify the sons of Levi, and purify them as gold and silver, that they may offer to the LORD an offering in righteousness. Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasant [or pleasing] to the LORD (Mal. 1:11; 3:3-4; see also Zeph. 3:9-10).

Thus, God’s name is always being praised. In every place – not just the meeting house – at all times, his priests are always before him, engaged in his ‘worship’. He has ensured that it is so, through Christ, in the gospel. And it pleases him.

C.H.Spurgeon put it in this way:

‘Pray without ceasing’...No man comes up to the stature of the Christian, or such a man as he should be, unless he cannot only pray for six hours together but his whole life long. It was said of good old Rowland Hill that people did not so much notice his particular times of retirement, for he was a man who was always praying, wherever he might be. You would often find him alone talking to himself. And even in company his heart would be going away to the object of his best love – he would still be in communion with Christ. Be always glorifying Christ, Christians, from the rising of the sun unto the going down



*The Priesthood of All Believers in Action*

thereof. Whether you work at a lapstone,<sup>20</sup> or drive a plough, or lay the stones in a building – ‘serve’ the Master in all these things. Whether you are diligent with the pen, or whether you buy and sell, or sail a ship<sup>21</sup> – do all even to your eating or your drinking in the name of the Lord Jesus – and so like the Holy Spirit let it be said of you: ‘He shall glorify me’.<sup>22</sup>

What’s next?

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<sup>20</sup> A stone a cobbler put in his lap to enable him to hammer the leather.

<sup>21</sup> My suggestion for the original ‘plough the sea’.

<sup>22</sup> Spurgeon sermon 465.