

Do people have approach to God only through a clergy class, priests, church, an organization, a certain denomination, or is approach to God directly through Jesus Christ, and him alone? What is the priesthood of the believer?



The Bible is written so that anyone can read and understand it for themselves, but each person has a serious responsibility to use the Bible correctly, **“accurately handling the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15 NASB).**

What is the priesthood of the believer??

“We do not write you anything you cannot read or understand”—2 Corinthians 1:13 NIV

“Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved . . . who correctly handles the word of truth”—2 Timothy 2:15 NIV

“The New Testament knows no spiritual aristocracy or nobility, but calls all believers ‘saints,’ though many fell far short of their vocation. Nor does it recognize a special priesthood in distinction from the people, as mediating between God and the laity. It knows only one high-priest, Jesus Christ, and clearly teaches the universal priesthood, as well as universal kingship, of believers”—Schaff’s History of the Christian Church, page 124

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

After Paul (who was then Saul) **“was baptized, and he took food and was strengthened. Now for several days he was with the disciples who were at**

Damascus, and immediately began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues” (Acts 9:18-29 LSB). Paul (Saul) immediately began to preach the gospel publicly, shortly after his baptism. He was serving as a Christian minister. His baptism served as his ordination ceremony. Years later, he said, “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1). A Christian is ordained to preach at his baptism.

“Paul, an apostle not from human beings but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised him from the dead . . . the gospel preached by me is not of human origin. For I did not receive it from a human being, nor was I taught it, but it came through a revelation of Jesus Christ . . . But when God . . . set me apart and called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me . . . I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood” (Galatians 1:1,11,12,15,16 NAB). Paul was not ordained by a church or any humans, but he was ordained directly by God the Father through Jesus Christ.

1 Peter 2:5 - “You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” (NIV) Under the New Covenant, all baptized Christians are priests wherever they are, at all times, which may be called the priesthood of the believer, and also, the priesthood of all believers. God wants Christians, **“his holy priests,”** God’s **“royal priests” (1 Peter 2:5,9 NLT),** to offer themselves as living and spiritual sacrifices – daily laying aside our own desires and following him, putting all our energy and resources at his disposal, and trusting him to guide us, praising God, praying and doing good.

However, this doesn’t diminish the scriptural truth **“that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church” (Ephesians 3:10 NAB).** The church has a vital place under the New Covenant and is not to be neglected. **“We should not stop gathering together with other believers” (Hebrews 10:25 GWT).**

Under the Old Covenant, men born into the Tribe of Levi of certain ages served as assistants

to the priests, who were men of certain ages born as descendants of Aaron served the nation of Israel as priests at God's earthly Tabernacle and later the Temple on earth. Only the Priests and Levites could enter certain areas of the Temple.

Hebrews 10:19 - "We have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus." (NIV). **John 14:6 - "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me" (NLT).** Each Christian believer now has access to God, secured by Jesus' sacrificial death and resurrection. Access for Christians is, therefore, through Jesus Christ alone, without the need of human intermediaries. This is possible because of the change of covenants that God implemented:

"He cancels the first covenant in order to put the second into effect" (Hebrews 10:9 NLT), that is, the **"new covenant"** with **"Christ"** as **"mediator"** (**Hebrews 9:14-15 NIV**). Under the Old Covenant, only the High Priest could enter the Most Holy, and that only once a year. Under the New Covenant, all Christians can, at any and all times, **"enter the Most Holy Place"** of God's great symbolic spiritual Temple through Jesus in prayer (**Hebrews 10:19**).

Ephesians 2:18 - "it is through Him that Jews and Gentiles alike have access through one Spirit to the Father." (Weymouth -

All people, Jews and non-Jews, have access to the Father through Jesus Christ, his Son, through the power of, and via the channel of, the holy Spirit.

1 Timothy 2:5 - "There is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus." - NIV

We sinful humans have direct access to God the Father through Jesus, without any human or organizational intermediaries. The church has its vital place in the Christian arrangement, but Jesus' role as mediator is not usurped by the Church, although it has been tried.

Romans 12:1 - "Offer your bodies as a living sacrifice. holy and pleasing to God -

this is your true and proper worship.” - NIV

“Your bodies” refers to the whole person. Our entire person and life should be ‘a living sacrifice to God.’

Revelation 8:3-4 - “He was given much incense to offer with the prayers of all God’s people... the smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of God’s people, went up before God from the angel’s hand.” - NIV

One of the sacrifices that Christians, as “holy priests”, offer, therefore, is prayer. This is also seen in the following two scriptures:

Psalms 141:2 - “Accept my prayer as incense offered to you, and my upraised hands as an evening offering.” - NLT

Revelation 5:8 - “They held gold bowls filled with incense, which are the prayers of God’s people.” - NLT. Under the Old Covenant, the priests would burn incense to God at the portable Tabernacle, and later, in the Temple at Jerusalem. Under the New Covenant, each Christian’s prayers are like the aroma of incense ascending to God.

Hebrews 13:15 - “Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise - the fruit of lips that openly profess his name.” - NIV. Praising God is another sacrifice that each Christian priest must offer. The priesthood of the believer also entails the believer-priest representing God to non-Christians, ‘openly, publicly, professing his name.’

Philippians 4:18 - “I am generously supplied with the gifts you sent me with Epaphroditus. They are a sweet-smelling sacrifice that is acceptable and pleasing to God.” - NLT. Material gifts can be another sacrifice the Christian priest offers, comparable to the Old Covenant **“peace offering.” (Leviticus 7:12-15)**

1 Timothy 2:1-2 - “I urge you, first of all, to pray for all people. Ask God to help them; intercede on their behalf, and give thanks for them. Pray for kings and all

who are in authority so that we can live peaceful and quiet lives marked by godliness and dignity.” - NIV. The Christian believer-priest appeals to God in intercession for others, making supplications, prayers, intercession and giving thanks for all.

1 John 2:20, 27 - “But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth.... As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit - just as it has taught you, remain in him.” - NIV. Believer-priests have an anointing from God. The Spirit’s anointing enables them to distinguish true and false teaching, based on the Bible. See **John 14:26**.

1 Peter 2:9 - “...You are a chosen people. You are royal priests, a holy nation, God’s very own possession. As a result, you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.” - NLT
“Since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God . . . let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need” (Hebrews 4:14,16 NIV) Christians can come directly into God’s presence through Christ.

We are also given the responsibility of bringing others to him. **(2 Corinthians 5:18-21)** This is the priestly work of reconciling God and people. being announcers of God. Evangelism is the great priestly work that believers as individuals, and the church as a whole, are to do.

Exodus 19:6 - “You will be my kingdom of priests, my holy nation.” - NLT. The nation of Israel was to become intermediaries between a holy God and a lost world. Through them God would reveal himself. **(1 Peter 2:9-10).** Israel broke this covenant. **(Exodus 19:5)** So God’s purpose for a kingdom of priests was not realized until Christ’s instituting the new covenant. The death and resurrection of Jesus allows each Christian direct access to God, and commissions each to be priests toward others, especially non-Christians.

Isaiah 61:6 - “You will be called the priests of Yahweh; You will be spoken of as ministers of our God.” - **NLT**. Under the old covenant, God ordained the priests of Israel to stand between him and his people. They brought God’s word to the people – and the people’s needs and sins to God. Under the new covenant, all believers are priests of God (**1 Peter 2:5**), reading God’s Word and seeking to understand it, confessing their sins directly to God through the mediatorship of Christ alone, and ministering to others.

As we have seen above, the Old Testament predicted a coming to pass of the priesthood of the believer.

Revelation 1:6 - “Has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father” (**NIV**). Christ made Christian disciples priests to administer God’s love to others. Christians qualify as a witnesses for Jesus primarily because of what he has done for them, and secondarily, because they “serve him day and night in his temple” (**Revelation 7:15 NIV**).

Revelation 5:10 - “You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth” (**NIV**). “Some manuscripts read they are reigning” (**NLT footnote**). The believers sing praises Christ for bringing them into the kingdom and making them kings and priests. Christ’s death made all Christian disciples priests of God – the channels of blessing between God and people. (**1 Peter 2:5-9**)

“No prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation” (2 Peter 1:20 NKJV). We must always keep this principle in mind and not use the priesthood of the believer for wild speculations. However, we have learned the following principles about the priesthood of the believer:

Every Christian is equal under God (Galatians 3:28).

Each believer has direct access to God through Christ (Hebrews 7:25-28).

Each Christian can go to God directly for forgiveness of sins. No human mediator is needed for this forgiveness (Hebrews 4:15-16, 1 Timothy 2:5).

Each believer is free and responsible for reading the Scriptures and can trust the Holy Spirit to provide guidance and interpretation (John 16:13, 2 Peter 1:20-21).

Christians are accountable to God for living out the Scriptures but are not accountable to any confession of faith written by humans. Scripture is complete and needs no addendum.

———Texas Baptists

The New Testament teaches the priesthood of the believer, and the priesthood of all believers.