The Priesthood of The Believer

The priesthood of each believer is Baptist thought is tied closely to another concept, that of soul competency. Each person has a God-given competence to know and follow God's will. A decision to follow Christ as Lord and Savior is an individual decision; no one can make it for another. Being a believer priest is a gift from God, not a human achievement; it comes with salvation. Each believer priest is responsible for his or her own actions. Individual believers can go directly to God without the aid of any intermediary. Individuals can speak for themselves without religious officials dictating to them what to believe. Believer priests are all equal to one another in Christ (Galatians 3:26-28). There is only one High Priest, that is Jesus Christ (Hebrews 7:23-8:13). Each believer priest has a responsibility to be committed to Christ and to share Christ through word and deed. As Peter stated it: "declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Peter 2:9 NIV).

The Priesthood of Believers

The New Testament also speaks of the priesthood of believers. Behever priests are part of the body of Christ. They form a community of believers. Although each believer priest is individually responsible to God, all believer priests are related to one another as brothers and sisters in Christ.

The fellowship of believer priests also aids in interpreting the Bible and understanding God's will. Although each believer priest can and ought to read and interpret the Bible for herself or himself, the competent and wise believer will seek insight and understanding from other believer priests. By studying the teachings of believer priests in the past and by seeking out the wisdom of those in the present, persons are aided in their understanding of the Bible and of God's will.

The Baptist model of a church rests on the concept of the priesthood of believers. A church is made up of persons who have exercised their God-given competency by believing in Jesus as Savior and Lord and by voluntarily associating with a particular fellowship of believers. Each believer priest in the fellowship is equal to all of the others. Therefore, no one is in authority over all. These decisions are made by the community of priests seeking to know the will of the head of the church, the great High Priest, Jesus Christ. They do this by prayer, Bible study, meditation, discussion and decisions.

Conclusion

So, which is it? Priesthood of the believer or priesthood of believers? It is neither or both and.

The term "the priesthood of the believer" communicates the biblical emphasis on the individual and soul competency. The term "priesthood of believers" communicates the biblical emphasis on community and fellowship.

Throughout history in all aspects of life, a tension has existed between the individual and the group. Christians have experienced both tension. We do well when we refuse to elevate one above the other, but instead attempt to keep them in balance.

For additional information on the concept of the priesthood of the believer and of believers, see www.baptistdistinctives.org.

Wanting to share information about Baptist distinctives, Noble Hurley, shortly before his death in 2004, established the Jane and Noble Hurley Baptist Identity Fund for the purpose of publishing this series and asked William M. Pinson Jr. and Doris A. Tinker to prepare the articles. © (Article 7)