

The Priesthood of Believers and the New Testament Pattern

Preacher: Harold Summers

Date: August 04, 2026

Church: 16th Avenue Gospel Chapel

References: **Exodus 19**, 1 Timothy 1:3; 1 Timothy 5:17; Titus 1:5; Exodus 19:3-6; Ephesians 4:7; Ephesians 4:11-12; 1 Corinthians 3:16-17; Matthew 23:9; Acts 20:17; Acts 20:28

Why 16th Avenue Chapel Is Different

I mentioned that we would have a general discussion this evening on the subject of the priesthood of believers. And I want us to take one specific subject tonight that may be a question that some of you have asked and probably one that we should all ask. And that is, why is it that at 16th Avenue Gospel Chapel, we don't operate like most other churches? Why is it we don't have a full-time pastor? What churches do you know that you can go to in Vancouver or elsewhere that don't have a full-time pastor? 16th doesn't have a full-time pastor. You go to other churches—evangelical churches or non-evangelical churches—and what are you going to find?

Well, you're going to find someone who is basically in charge. They may call him a priest. They may call him father. They may call him the reverend. They may call him doctor. They may call him the pastor. They may call him a lot of things. But usually there's one person in charge. And interestingly enough, it's not just occasionally you find that. Most other churches will have somebody who's full-time in charge. But we don't. We don't have somebody who's paid. We don't have somebody who is the boss. The question is, why? Why are we different from the other churches? Okay, do we know why?

And the answer very simply is because we would like to do things at 16th Avenue Gospel Chapel the way it's done in the New Testament. And you will not find anywhere in the New Testament of a church that had a full-time pastor or priest or whatever else you want to call it. You won't find it anywhere. Now, I'm just going to ask you the one question: Did you know that you wouldn't find it anywhere? Frankly, until I started looking at it in more detail, I thought, well, surely there must be some New Testament model that people are following for this. But they don't find it. You won't find it anywhere. So that's the question. Let's pray and ask the Lord for the answer.

Lord, we pray that You'll just guide us this evening. We're going to look at this specific question, and we need Your specific answer. So help us, Lord, to understand. Help us to be committed to the simple principle. We want to do things the way they were done in the apostolic days. We don't want to invent how a church should be run. We want to run the assembly in the way You want it run. And, Lord, You gave us the precedent in the New Testament. We want to follow it. Help us this evening, we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.

New Testament Precedents

All right. So the Apostle Paul was a great preacher. What church was he the pastor of? Well, you say, well, he spent a couple of years here and a couple of years there. But, no, he was never the pastor anywhere. There was a man by the name of Peter; the Roman Catholics say he was the first Pope. What was he the pastor of? What church was he the pastor of? Oh, they say, well, no, we don't know. Well, that's interesting. What about Timothy? Now Timothy, you might turn to 1 Timothy. Timothy was—he was in the city I believe of Ephesus, I'm not sure, but people say he was the first pastor or he was the chief pastor or he was in charge in the city of Ephesus, city of Ephesus. It's verse 2, verse 3.

[1 Timothy 1:3 NKJV]

As I urged you when I went into Macedonia--remain in Ephesus that you may charge some that they teach no other doctrine,

Now what did he leave him there for? Well, most people would tell you he left them there so he could be the pastor. But what's the verse say? "That thou mightest charge some that they teach no other doctrine." What? Was he the chief priest or chief pastor? Did he do all the preaching? No. What was his job? To tell the preachers that they had to preach the right thing. He wasn't there to do the preaching. He was there to train the preachers. Now, frankly, you'll find that most people don't understand that. They will tell you he was the first pastor there. He was a chief preacher, but he wasn't there for that reason. He was there to make sure that the teachers taught the right thing.

Turn over to chapter 5. 1 Timothy chapter 5. And we'll just read one verse together. It says:

[1 Timothy 5:17 NKJV]

Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine.

Who did the teaching in the city of Ephesus where Timothy was responsible for making things in order? Who did the teaching? Well, the elders did the teaching. They labored in the word and doctrine. Very, very interesting.

What about Titus? Titus was left in Crete, wasn't he? And so turn over to the book of Titus. Verse chapter 1, verse 5, Titus.

[Titus 1:5 NKJV]

For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you--

That was his job. Both of them were sent to the various cities, left in the various cities, and they were left there in order that they might do the work that had to be done. Verse, I guess that's maybe all we need on that.

So my question is, in the New Testament, where can you find an example of one man who was the pastor, priest, father—give them any name you want, reverend—where can you find one who was in charge? And the answer is you can't. What does the pastor in a church usually do? Well, he does the preaching, and he does the visitation, and he does the weddings and funerals and the other key things. What do the other people do? Well, by and large, they say, "Yes, sir." But that's not the New Testament way at all. And I just think it's a very simple but a very profound principle that it is **not** the New Testament church model for there to be one man in charge.

What is our responsibility as 16th? Well, we could say we would like to be like the other churches. All the other good churches have somebody in charge, so we better have someone in charge too. Does that make sense? Well, a lot of good people out there do a lot of things. But if they're doing something wrong, you don't do that. And so we all say, "Lord, I want to do what's right." If Waldo does this and it's right, I want to follow Waldo. If Waldo does that and it's wrong, then I don't want to follow Waldo. Is Waldo a good guy? Probably. But if he's doing something wrong, I don't want to do the wrong. So it's all very, very simple. The clerisy, the man-in-charge system, is not biblical, and we don't follow it because it's not what God wants.

A Kingdom of Priests

So turn over now to the book of Exodus chapter 19. Way back, Exodus chapter 19. And I've been looking at these verses a lot recently. I think they're absolutely wonderful. Exodus 19. And we'll pick up the theme as we go. Verse 3.

[Exodus 19:3 NKJV]

³ And Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel:

Okay, this is what you've got to say to them, Moses. Verse 4.

[Exodus 19:4 NKJV]

⁴ "You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself.

Why did the Lord deliver the children of Israel from Egypt? Well, some people will say, because they prayed, and they said, "Lord, we don't like being slaves anymore. Would You please get us out of here? We don't want to be slaves." Or they might say, well, God made some promises to Abraham and the others, and He wanted to fulfill those promises. And that's true, too. But what does this verse say? This verse says, "I brought Israel out of Egypt to Myself." Is that an encouraging line? Why do you say you? Because you had a hopeless mess behind you before you got saved. It's true. Why did He save you? He brought you to Himself. I think that's just absolutely marvelous. And in that context, then, verse 5.

[Exodus 19:5 NKJV]

⁵ Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine.

Thank you. Why did He bring him to Himself? So that we would be a peculiar treasure to Him. What is God's great treasure? Okay, you can be proud and you can say, "Me." You and I are God's great treasure. It's absolutely marvelous. Above all people. Of all the people in the world, who does He consider to be a treasure? You, me. Hallelujah. All right. "For all the earth is Mine," He says. Verse 6.

[Exodus 19:6 NKJV]

⁶ And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel."

What did He want them to be? A kingdom of priests. Now what happened? Well, when Moses was on the mountain, they decided that they were going to serve the golden calf. And they lost their priestly position. God chose their tribe, Levi, and Aaron was chosen a priest. But instead of a kingdom of priests where the Gadites and the Asherites and those from the tribe of Naphtali were all priests to God, there were just a few priests to God because of their great sin.

What is our responsibility? At 16th Avenue Gospel Chapel, our responsibility is to be to God a peculiar treasure. All of us are. We don't say to somebody, "You come, you be our priest." We don't say that at all. Why don't we do that? Because that was not God's practice in the New Testament, and it was not God's plan even for Israel in the Old Testament. Much of the priestly organization that we have in the world today is patterned after the Old Testament. Some of it patterned after, I'm going to say, the corporate world. But God says, no, that's not what I've got. I want a peculiar treasure. I want people who will follow My simple model, follow My simple logic.

Operating as the Body of Christ

All right. So, Ephesians chapter 4. Ephesians chapter 4. What is God's plan for the Ephesians? Ephesians chapter 4. And verse 7 says,

[Ephesians 4:7 NKJV]

But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift.

Verse 11, and the Lord gave,

[Ephesians 4:11-12 NKJV]

¹¹ And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, ¹² for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ,

It doesn't say in every church one man is going to do it all. It doesn't say that. That's not God's plan. God's plan is that all the members of the assembly be priests. And so the theme goes on for the next many verses—delightful theme. Same logic you get over in 1 Corinthians chapter 12 and so many other places in the New Testament. God's plan is that we **all** be priests.

So what then? 1 Corinthians chapter 3, I believe. I think we read this just the other day. 1 Corinthians 3. Verse 16 says,

[1 Corinthians 3:16-17 NKJV]

¹⁶ Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? ¹⁷ If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are.

And elsewhere we have—and I don't have the precise verse in front of me now, but we have the logic that we are the body of Christ. And if we're the body of Christ, then we operate as a body. And I've mentioned to you before, all the members of the body report to the head. My elbow doesn't give instructions to my wrist; the head gives instructions to the wrist. And in the body, we don't have one man who is responsible—in the body of Christ, one man who is responsible for all the rest of it, and we take our instructions from him, we pay him, we listen to him. That's not God's plan at all. God's plan is that we are all of that body of Christ.

I think it was Jade Nicholson who taught me that, or taught us—I was listening—he taught us that the New Testament model, among other things, has a great advantage of being persecution proof. If you have a church where you have one man who's at the top and all the other people are reporting to him and he's doing the work and they're listening, what happens if you put that man in jail? What can happen? You put him in jail and the church stops functioning. What happens if you have an assembly where you have a number of overseers and all the others in the assembly are like the overseers, each doing his own work? What happens if you take one man out? The others carry on. What happens if you take two men out? The others carry on. What happens if you take a lot of them out? The others carry on. Persecution proof.

And I told you this story before, I'm sure, of the days in Singapore, the days before the Second World War, at the beginning of the Second World War. The—I guess it was the Japanese—came down the Malaysian Peninsula to the city of Singapore. And the missionaries who'd been there doing what they could to build an assembly, they said, "The Japanese are

coming, we got to get out of here." So the missionaries who had been doing a lot of the leadership in that assembly, they got on a boat and they went back to England. And the assembly got together and they said, "The missionaries have gone. What are we going to do?" And some of the good men, mostly young men, sat down around a table and they said one to another, "Well, I think you should be in charge of the Sunday school. And I think you should be..." And they divided up the ministry of the work of God among them. They were all good preachers. They'd all been trained. And they just took on different responsibilities. The missionaries left probably on Monday. By the next Sunday, the assembly was working great. And not only was it working great, one of the most successful, largest growing assemblies I've ever heard of was that simple assembly at Bras Basah in Singapore.

If everything is done by the full-time pastor, if everything had been done by the missionary and they hadn't been training others and they didn't have an assembly, when the missionaries left, the assembly would have just crashed. But because all these young men were doing great work for God—young in age, but they had been trained by the missionary to fulfill their ministry as priests—the assembly didn't just carry on, it grew gloriously through those difficult years.

All right, so what else can we say? In a system where you have a full-time pastor, you have a clerisy-laity distinction. Some are the clerics, they're the bosses; the others are just laity, and the laity report to the clergy, but the clergy are running things. Do you find that anywhere in the New Testament? And the answer is no, it's not there. The church around us tends to spend a lot of its time glorifying the priests, the people in charge, and God's church says, "No, we don't do that."

Most of these churches have a specific name for the man in charge: the priest, the pastor, whatever you call him. What name, what honor, what distinction do we give to those who are in charge of the work of God in the assembly? What name do we call them? You know, we call them brother—brother so-and-so, brother so-and-so, sister so-and-so, sister. We don't call them by an elevated name. We just call them brother. That's very significant. "Don't call any man your father," the Lord said. "You've got one Father in heaven."

[Matthew 23:9 NKJV]

Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven.

Be careful what you call others. Don't call them father. Don't call them by the other names. You just call them brother. You call them sister. I think that's marvelous.

If, in fact, you were to have someone who was full-time doing all the work, what would you pay him? Well, you'd probably sit down with him before he came, and you'd say to him, "You know, we would like you to come and be our pastor, and we will pay you so much." That's pretty much always the case. Sometime you hear this story and the man says, "I used to be a pastor there, but I got a call from another church and they offered to pay me more, so I decided I would go and be a pastor there." You say, "Oh, something wrong there." Do you know in Scripture, in the New Testament, you don't find anybody guaranteeing to pay anybody anything? How does God's pastor, how does the man who's doing God's work get paid? He gets down on his knees and prays and the Lord gives him some money. So the pastoral system is—it's not only illogically wrong, it's not proper from a point of view of the scriptural pattern, the New Testament pattern, but it introduces all manner of weaknesses.

Appointing Leaders God's Way

And how, for example, if there were to be a full-time pastor at 16th, how would we appoint them? And I'm not sure how they're appointed in other places. Most of them would say we introduce them to the congregation, and then the congregation took a vote. How are the men of God supposed to be appointed? Acts chapter 20. Acts chapter 20. You'll remember in Acts chapter 20 that Paul, as he was heading back to Jerusalem, called the elders at Ephesus to meet him at Miletus—I believe it was, I can't remember, but they came to meet him on the beach, really. Sorry, it says, verse 17,

[Acts 20:17 NKJV]

From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church.

at Ephesus, not Philippi. He called the church at Ephesus. And when they were come to him, he said to them, you know, and he started talking to them about what was going to happen in the future. And then he says in verse 28, verse 28,

[Acts 20:28 NKJV]

Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

How do we appoint overseers in the assembly? Well, how do we do it? And the answer is we pray, and we pray, and we pray. And then we say, "Lord, would You take me?" And He tells us who they should be. We don't say, if Wally gets more votes than Fred, then Wally is going to be the—no. The whole New Testament principle is not one of corporate organizing, but of the Holy Spirit and with humility. We say, "Lord, that is what we would like. We would like to go that way. We would like to do things..."

All right. So that's the basic logic. It's amazing to me that the church model in the world today is one man over the church. He's the boss, like the president of the corporation or like the Pope. But it's not a New Testament principle, and it is not the objective of the Lord. That's not His way. So our question is, what are we trying to do at 16th? It's true, we're not completely like all the other churches in the community or in the world. What is our objective? Very simple. We would like to be—we call it a New Testament church. We want to find out how things were run in the New Testament, and we want to say, "Lord, could we be run the same way, please?" And so much that's wrong in the organization is because one man is elevated to the position of priest or pastor or reverend or whatever you call it, and we say, "No, Lord, that's not what we want. We want to do it God's way."

And so we say, "Lord, would You please raise up men of God?" And by the grace of God, we get that. 16th Avenue Gospel Chapel is an interesting place. We often have outstanding preachers at 16th Avenue Gospel Chapel. And I'm amazed how many really good men, people who have written really good books, have often preached at 16th. We couldn't do that if we hired one man and he did all the preaching.

There was a man who was at 16th years ago—I probably told this story before—and he decided he was going to leave 16th. He'd maybe go to another church. So anyway, he thought he might go to this particular church. He basically said, "I'm going to sit down with the pastor there and talk to him because I'm not sure whether I should go or not." So anyway, he sat down with him, and the pastor wisely said to him, "Now tell me, what is your spiritual gift?" And he thought for a while, and he said, "Well, probably my spiritual gift is preaching. I'm a good preacher." And the pastor said, "Now, hang on a minute. You've got to understand, I do the preaching at this church. And you can come, but don't you think that because you come, you're going to do the preaching here." So what do you think the man did? He said, "I'm not going to that church."

So we do a lot of things slightly different here. What is it that we want to do? We want to do it the way they did it in the New Testament. We want to rely on the Holy Spirit to lead us and guide us the same way as He led in the New Testament, and we don't want to follow all the other models around us, and in particular, this model, which is almost a universal model

around us, which says we will have a full-time pastor. We'll pay him so much, he'll do these things, and the rest of us will do a few other things, but he's going to be the boss.

All right, well, that's just an introduction to this subject, but I think we all need to realize why we do certain things. And so why don't we have a pastor? Because it is a New Testament model.

Lord, we pray that You'll help us. We thank You that You're the One who's building the church. We thank You that You're the head of the church, and we just pray that You will bless us as an assembly. Lord, we appreciate every good man, every good woman that You give us. We believe, Lord, that You have gifted many amongst us. We need to do the things that the full-time pastor is often paid to do. We believe that You've gifted many of us to do those things. Lord, may we rise, accept our responsibility, and do those things. Lord, one thing to say, we believe in this model. It would be a totally different thing if we didn't do what the model says. So, Lord, help us to rise and do what we should do and do it Your way rather than the way that might not be Your way. We ask Your blessing now. We give thanks in Jesus' name. We pray that You will build the church of God at 16th Avenue Gospel Chapel. We give thanks in Jesus' name. Amen.