

The All-Body Ministry

As we have seen, church rule and care has been ruined, twisted into a monstrosity. In tandem – the one feeding off the other – the priesthood of all believers has been allowed to dwindle into practical neglect, so that it has become the poor relation of the Christian religion, rarely discussed, let alone thought about, least of all acted upon. And for those who do have some concept of it, too frequently they think of it as an individual thing, a personal thing – I can go directly to God for myself. A wonderful truth, of course, but one that fails to exhaust the breadth and depth of meaning of this priesthood.

For, as I have shown, the priesthood of all believers is intimately connected with the all-body ministry of the church. And the decay of the one has led to the demise of the other. Consequently, since this priesthood should be a vital factor of church life, yet, sadly, is so often the missing factor, I feel I must raise it again. If we are to see a revival of New Testament church life, its recovery is essential.

The fact is, for all practical purposes the overwhelming majority of believers act as though it is *the priesthood of no believers*. I am not saying that this is deliberate. Rather, it happens by default, by a failure to cultivate the biblical priesthood of *all* believers. But the effect is virtually a priesthood of no believers. Oh, I know we parrot the phrase, and, of course, it features in most Confessions of Faith: ‘We believe in the priesthood of all believers’. Oh, yes. But too often it has become a mere slogan, a mantra. A form of words without real content or implication, it makes no practical difference to most believers whatsoever. The result is tragic. The priesthood of *no* believers is the reality for many, I am afraid.

It gets worse. Worse? Yes, indeed. Millions really believe in *the priesthood of some believers*. This is what happens when, failing to cultivate the biblical priesthood of *all* believers, churches lay an unbiblical stress on professional ministers. And this, sad to say, is far from uncommon; in fact, it is virtually the norm. Many believers have espoused, albeit unwittingly, the ideas of the Fathers who, taking the old covenant, as worked out in the levitical priesthood, and applying it to the church, ended up with the special priesthood

The All-Body Ministry

of the few. And this has come at a very heavy cost. As Eastwood pointed out: ‘The transition in the meaning of priesthood is one of the most important landmarks in the history of the church’.¹ And that for ill! When it happens, believers lose a far-reaching principle of the new covenant, and finish up with the priesthood of the few.

It gets even worse. Having got this far, it is but a short step to *the priesthood of one believer in each church!* Really? Yes, for millions, adherents of the Church of Rome and the Church of England, chief among them. But not only they! No, indeed! Most evangelicals (not excluding the Reformed) hold to the priesthood of *one* believer in each church. Oh yes, they do! When they break Christ’s express command (Matt. 23:1-12), and describe and define a certain man among them by giving him a highfalutin title, such as Reverend, Pastor, Minister, and the like, when they look upon him as an ordained member of a set-apart clerical class – which they often do, even while vehemently denying that they believe in a clergy! – they are in danger, to put it no stronger, of believing in the priesthood of *one* believer. And this is the high road to sacerdotalism.

The pastor system has a lot to answer for. Warkentin: ‘The creation of a privileged class of believers presents a danger to the priesthood of all believers’.² I agree – except I would put it more strongly. And the outcome of that ‘danger’ is all too evident, I am afraid. Many are content to let their ‘pastor’ get on with church affairs which, after all, is ‘the minister’s work’.³ And, in my experience, it frequently appears that ‘the pastor’ is happy to have it this way. So much so, many churches have developed a dependency culture in which the members are content to be spectators watching their pastor do the work. Routinely, there seems to be a notion that church life – if not Christianity itself – is, for the majority, a ‘spectator sport’. A few get ‘involved’ – they are especially ‘keen’ – while the majority can watch (and criticise) from the safety of the sidelines. But God’s word, with its priesthood of all believers, cuts right across all such sinful goings on. A return

¹ Eastwood: *Faithful* p88.

² Warkentin p181. I am not suggesting that, in the contemporary pastor-system, ‘privilege’ means luxury and wealth.

³ This has been said to me.

The All-Body Ministry

to Scripture, with the proper reinstatement of that priesthood, is the only cure.

In asserting this, of course, I am not going back on what I have already said about the New Testament and its establishment of a stated ministry. That is, I am not denying the patent biblical principle that God has set apart certain brothers for the rule of the church under a stated teaching/preaching ministry, under the authority of Christ, and, where appropriate, for them to receive financial support in the discharge of that ministry. Not at all. How could I deny it? I wouldn't dream of doing such a foolish thing. It is written large in Scripture. Not only that. I have myself participated in it for over 50 years. Nevertheless, the unbiblical – but almost ubiquitous – emphasis upon 'the minister' or 'the pastor' has done much to undermine the vital biblical principle of the priesthood of all believers; or *vice-versa*.

But while I am not speaking against a stated ministry, neither am I advocating an every-man (or woman) public teaching ministry. That would be unbiblical and daft. We must recognise stated teachers and leaders. We need them. They are, after all, Christ's gift to his church (Eph. 4:11-13). Believers are to be taught by stated, able teachers. But what for? So that they can be edified, established in the faith! Yes, indeed! *But this is not an end in itself*. It is, of course, but, in addition, believers must be taught so that they grow in knowledge and understanding in order to enable them to take their part in the teaching ministry among themselves – as members of the priesthood of all believers. I am not for a moment suggesting that each and every believer is qualified to occupy a stated ministry in the public sense. Nevertheless, one of the great ends of that stated ministry is the enrichment of believers to help them to carry out the all-body, mutual teaching ministry among themselves, and to do so with increasing profit.

But it is not what happens in the majority of churches today. And it is a disaster of mammoth proportions, hard to overstate. The church is a body (1 Cor. 12:12-31). How sadly neglected is Paul's statement of the obvious: 'The body is not made up of one part' (1 Cor. 12:14), 'not one member' (NKJV). The system, so prevalent among us today, blurs this obvious point – and worse. Are believers taught to feed themselves and feed others – or are they taught to be

The All-Body Ministry

increasingly dependent upon the pastor? In most cases, the answer needs no spelling out! And this, I say, is very serious.

If, say, a quarter of a man's body remains inactive, he is to be pitied – he is suffering massive paralysis. How hard the medics work to try to stimulate the dead part into life and action! A quarter, did I say? Imagine the awful condition of a paralysed man who can do nothing but exercise one organ – his mouth; all he can do is talk. Too often this is a valid description of the average church. The pastor preaches, and all the rest remain largely inactive – *spiritually* inactive, I mean. Yet the New Testament envisages all believers having a teaching and preaching ministry!

Just because a man is *not* gifted to preach or teach in a pulpit, it does not mean he has *no* preaching or teaching gift *at all*. We must rid ourselves of the notion that preaching always means declaiming from a pulpit. In saying this, I repeat, yet again, I am not casting any aspersion on pulpit work, or trying in any way to diminish its importance. Not at all. Able public preachers and teachers, I am convinced, are a principal gift of Christ to his churches, and, as such, must be highly valued and appreciated. But they are only one gift among many. *And one of the main functions of the stated ministry is to nurture all the other gifts.*

Every believer a priestly minister? Yes, it is so. All are gifted by God to be such. As we have seen, the new covenant guarantees it (Isa. 54:13; 61:6; Jer. 31:31-34; 33:14-22; Ezek. 40:46; 44:10-31; Zeph. 3:9-10; Mal. 3:1-4; John 6:45; 2 Cor. 1:21-22; 1 Thess. 4:9; Heb. 8:8-12; 10:15-18; 1 Pet. 2:4-12; 4:10-11; 1 John 2:20-21,27; 5:20; Rev. 1:6; 5:10; 20:6). All the saints are ministers; all engage in ministry. Note the emphasis in the string of passages I have already quoted (Rom. 1:11-12; 12:3-8; 15:14; 1 Cor. 1:4-7; 12:1-31, especially 4-7,11,18; 2 Cor. 3:5-6; Eph. 2:19-22; 4:7-16,29; 5:18-21; Col. 3:15-17; 1 Thess. 5:11,14-15; 1 Pet. 2:2-5; 4:7-11; Jude 20-23). On each believer, Christ bestows a gift so that *all* might serve the church. These passages tell us that *all* the saints are ministers, *all* are engaged in the ministry, and that apostles, prophets, evangelists and pastors-and-teachers are given to the churches – and used by Christ – in order to equip *all* the saints for this 'work of the ministry' (NKJV); that is, for 'works of service' (Eph. 4:11-16). This 'work of the ministry' is something *all* the

The All-Body Ministry

saints are to do. It is not something reserved for an ordained minister. As I said before, if I may pick just one verse from the above, may I stress: ‘Therefore encourage *one another* and build *each other* up, just as in fact you 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 in fact you are doing’. We are not talking about mere theory; ‘just as in fact you are doing’. Not ‘just as you used to do’; not ‘just as you once did’; not ‘just as you would like to do’. But ‘just as in fact you *are* doing’.

In the very early days, the gospel was advanced throughout Judea and Samaria by preaching – preaching which was carried out, we are expressly told, without the apostles (Acts 8:1,4,14). And this was before elders were being recognised. And it was surely done by both men and women, not only by preachers in the usual sense of the word; possibly, not at all by the common way we think of preaching today. By women? Really? Certainly!

According to Scripture, women play a vital part in witnessing for Christ in the gospel – or should do. How about 1 Peter 3:1-6? What about chatting over the garden fence, having a natter while waiting for the children to come out of school, at the clinic, standing in the queue, and so on? ‘Gossiping the gospel’ must not be allowed to die. It is a potent weapon in the advance of Christ’s cause. John Bunyan was seriously affected, was he not, by overhearing three or four women sitting in the sun at Bedford, discussing spiritual matters?⁴ Women of Bedford, women of Much-Dozing-By-The-Pulpit... arise! Spiritual talk can work wonders. God can make it so.

Again, the writer to the Hebrews could make the claim that all his hearers – not just ‘pastors’ – needed to be mature in order to be teachers (Heb. 5:12). *All*, please note. *Teachers*, please note. All the saints teachers? Of course. Why ever not? A believer can teach without ever standing in a pulpit, you know. Have I not made it clear enough? Private, conversational instruction from the Bible, whether with sinners or saints, is proper preaching and real teaching! In the interest of practical illustration, may I make a suggestion? Why give a recording of the sermon to someone who

⁴ See *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* on Google Books.

The All-Body Ministry

cannot get to the service? Why not visit the person, repeat the sermon in your own words, and then the pair of you discuss it, with an open Bible, and then pray over the matter? Could this not be a vibrant teaching ministry? Would it not be mutually edifying? From many years' experience, I can assure you that the best way to learn a subject is to try to teach it to others.

Consider the words of Joel, quoted by Peter at Pentecost. God did *not* say: 'On your pastors, upon your ministers, I will pour out my Spirit'. Not at all! It was 'on all people' that God promised to pour out his Spirit. On *all* people! And he did it! Furthermore, as he said, it was 'your sons and daughters' who would 'prophesy' (Acts 2:17). Your sons *and daughters*!

And this ministry must be something more than *preaching* and *teaching* in the ministerial, as commonly understood, sense of the word, otherwise women are excluded – since they cannot teach in this *official-ministerial* sense (1 Cor. 14:33-35; 1 Tim. 2:11-12). Yet, according to the many passages I have quoted or cited, women still need to be equipped to play their part in the ministry of the church. And that does not mean that the role of women in the church – as has so very often been the case – is to be relegated to practical, domestic chores, limited to tea making, cake baking, sandwich cutting, meeting house cleaning, flower arranging, and so on. I am not saying a word against such – although, apart from the cleaning, I am not saying much of a word in favour, either – but I am appealing for what the New Testament speaks of; namely, women as well as men are teaching ministers – *in the sense in which I have been using the word*.

Reader, can you sense my difficulty in the previous paragraph? A believing woman (as well as a believing man) is a 'minister', and can preach and teach. Indeed, she must preach and teach (Tit. 2:3-5). Priscilla certainly did (Acts 18:24-28). Every believing woman is gifted by Christ to preach and teach (*in the sense in which I have been using the words*). But since we have so corrupted these words – 'preach' and 'teach' – I am forced to qualify them by the term *official-ministerial*. I hope I make my concern clear at this point. Our perversion of the biblical word 'minister' has ruined our understanding of the glorious work of ministry which Christ has entrusted to *all* his people. And not only our *understanding* of it;

The All-Body Ministry

the *experience* of it has sadly suffered. The churches must recover New Testament ground here. It is a vital necessity.

Consider: ‘Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God’ (2 Cor. 1:3-4). Read on to the end of verse 7 for the mutuality of suffering and comfort between believers. Who is it, in the average traditional church, who is expected to do the visiting and comforting? Although there have been exceptions, in my experience, one man (and, maybe, his wife) has the job – the pastor! Words fail. In many churches, I admit, this is somewhat extended by the appointment of a band of specially designated sick-visitors. But even here, in this delegated approach, this mechanical or institutional way of doing things, while I do not go so far as to call it ‘wrong’, and while it is a big improvement on the one-man band, it surely falls short of the principles behind this passage. Who experiences troubles? Don’t *all* believers? God comforts – whom? Does he not comfort *every* believer? Who then can use that comfort, that experience, to comfort others? On the delegated system, who comforts the pastor?⁵ I am sure that the apostle’s words in 2 Corinthians 8:1-15, especially 13-15, are of far wider application than financial support – which, of course, it certainly includes.

This is how the New Testament churches functioned – in spontaneous spiritual activity leading to mutual edification. Sadly, this mutual teaching concept was quickly lost by the churches, and, once lost, was not – is not – easily regained. Owen complained of

⁵ As I have already remarked, Lloyd-Jones was reckoned to be a ‘pastor’ for ‘pastors’. So... where did *he* go? See my *Priesthood* for the futile circular motion involved in the Roman system. It is just as much a part of the evangelical and Reformed world, however! There is a good circular motion, I hasten to add. As in any healthy body, there ought to be a mutual dependence and assistance between all believers. Good advice is to be sought wherever it may be found. This biblical ‘circular motion’ is excellent. To institutionalise it, however, is to give it the kiss of death. And to turn ‘the pastor’ into ‘the great and only adviser’ is to go a long way to giving *him* the kiss of death!

the churches which, in his day, had departed from the New Testament in this respect. Their members, he said, were content to hear, but make no effort to be teachers themselves. How very different, Owen observed, to the New Testament:

Our hearers do not look upon it as their duty to be teachers; at least not in the church, and by means of the knowledge to be attained therein. They think it enough for them, if at best they can hear with some profit to themselves. But this was not the state of things in [New Testament] times. Every church was then a seminary, wherein provision and preparation was made, not only for the preaching of the gospel in itself, but for the calling, gathering and teaching of other churches also.⁶

I wish that last sentence could be said of us today.

Let me dramatise the point. There is a sense in which it could be said that a very real test of an elder's service is to see how close he can get to doing himself out of a job! What? You can't be serious! Oh yes I am! Under an elder's care, the body should be becoming more and more mature, more and more able and willing to rule and teach itself (Eph. 4:11-16).

By way of illustration, let me remind you of one of the fundamentals in the rearing of children within the family. Surely one of the major aims in the up-bringing of our children is to produce mature, (in the right sense) self-sufficient adults. What parent would want a thirty-year-old son as dependent as a three-year-old? The pedagogue disciplined the boy until he was mature – but no further (Gal. 4:1–2).

Shouldn't something similar apply to church life? Yet why is it – how is it – that so many believers are no more able to open their Bible in order to instruct, edify, rebuke, encourage, refute, or whatever, after thirty years of Reformed expository preaching than they were at the start? Is it worse than that, in fact? Is it possible that believers become more dependent on 'the pastor' as the years pass – not less?

In saying this, common sense need not be jettisoned. I have, as I indicated, purposely dramatised the point. Because the church needs constant and consistent teaching, because it is a living body, a growing body, because new converts are (we hope) being added

⁶ Owen: *Hebrews* Vol.3 Part 1 p568. Owen was commenting on Heb. 5:12.

to the church, and need to be built up, because old errors in new dress constantly appear – elders can never be redundant, and those whom God has gifted as pastors-and-teachers must continue to exercise their gift and ministry. Even so, every elder ought to ask himself: After all the years I have been teaching and ruling in this church, is it more mature, more able to fend for itself, than when I started, or would the church be left in chaos if I died? Have I mollycoddled the people, and made them increasingly dependent on me, or are they now more able to read and grasp Scripture for themselves – compared to when I started? Are they growing more and more skilled at edifying one another? Are they growing more mature in facing trial and affliction, or less? Are they spiritually stimulating to me? And are they more so now than when I started?

The sad truth is too often the wrong alternative to the answers to those questions. So another question suggests itself. As R.Paul Stevens put it: ‘Who could have designed a system, as has surely happened, by which people can hear two sermons a Sunday for the whole of their lives, and [yet] not be able to open up the Bible to others publicly?’⁷ And how often, when the great preacher leaves, the church falls to pieces, drifts aimlessly, or swings wildly to the opposite end of the theological spectrum! Surely no believer living during the closing quarter of the 20th century and on can have forgotten the dramatic change at Westminster Chapel in the years after Lloyd-Jones left.⁸ And what of the changes at the Metropolitan Tabernacle after Spurgeon?⁹ And it does not happen only to well-known churches; the phenomenon is widespread.

The almost total lack of understanding, let alone practice, of an all-body ministry, means that many churches today are little more than preaching centres spiced with social networking – or *vice-versa*; increasingly, I think, the *vice-versa*. And as for the spiritual work, too often, believers are content to watch ‘the pastor’, or the elders, or some specially dedicated people, see to that side of things, while they engage, if they engage at all, in the social round of the church. In fact, most church members are happy not to think

⁷ Stevens pp169-172.

⁸ I am thinking *post* Glyn Owen.

⁹ See Iain Murray: *Forgotten* pp208-249. Do not miss Spurgeon’s own (inadvertent?) contribution, as ‘The Pastor’, to the catastrophe.

The All-Body Ministry

things through for themselves, but to leave church policy, church decisions, and church direction to the hierarchy above them. The ‘rubber stamp’, however, is *not* a New Testament picture of the believer in the local assembly.

It gets worse. Unwilling to think through Scripture for themselves – or not expecting or expected to think through Scripture for themselves – many believers ask no questions, discuss no spiritual issues. As for those who do, not infrequently they can find themselves dismissed as ‘trouble-makers’. This lack of curiosity about spiritual questions among believers is one of the saddest marks of the decline of spiritual life today. In my experience, the average believer is far too accepting, displaying a remarkable lack of concern about spiritual matters, along with a highly-developed unquestioning attitude to what he is told. And when – if – he is confronted by some idea he has never met before, he seems signally uninterested in finding out what is right or what is wrong with it. I say ‘he’ but I also include ‘she’! A spiritual apathy, a spiritual disinterestedness – not to say, uninterestedness (boredom) – is prevalent – *within the church*, I mean. There is hardly any curiosity about spiritual things – even among ministers and prospective ministers!¹⁰ Spiritual passivity, which leads to the surrender of spiritual thought and activity to a specially devoted individual or group, is quite wrong. It is nothing other than having a ‘clergy’. And I make no bones about it: I am pointing the finger both at the system *and* the people who like it.

Furthermore, let me remind you, reader, that in all this, I am not confining my remarks to Romanists or Anglicans. Far from it! The fault can be found much closer to home, despite ingenious attempts to disguise it by Nonconformist verbiage. Although it is easy to see how Spurgeon was not always consistent in this area, in this extract, at least, he pressed the right button:

There are many, alas! too many, who make a dissenting minister as much their priest as the Catholic makes his priest his helper... Oh, take

¹⁰ I simply cannot understand lack of spiritual inquisitiveness among young men who aspire to be preachers of the gospel. But I not infrequently find it! How is it that curiosity about spiritual matters is at a premium among *them*? If *they* are not asking questions, how do they expect their ministry to encourage believers to do it?

The All-Body Ministry

care [beware] of priestcraft, take care of mancraft, of ministercraft, of clergycraft. All God's people are clergy... There never ought to have been a distinction between clergy and laity.¹¹

Take the central act in most churches today – the preaching service. What are its chief characteristics? I am afraid that where the priesthood of all believers is not emphasised as it should be, the preaching, if no other part of the service, can tend to the soporific. Yet, as Eastwood pointed out: 'Luther did not regard worship as a soporific; on the contrary it was a mighty activity of the spirit [and Spirit – DG] which made heavy demands upon those who were partakers in it'.¹²

Just a minute! Why should the down-playing of the priesthood of all believers help to turn the sermon into a sleeping pill? Because, putting aside pioneer gospel-work, the stated teaching and preaching ministry is really founded on the priesthood of all believers. Where that breaks down, all sorts of troubles follow. Let me explain.

All that I have argued for is built upon the presupposition that the church is made up of believers who have a living relationship with each other. The church is, or is meant to be, a living body. In a very real sense, a stated preacher can only fulfil his ministry, and believers can only mutually instruct, comfort and warn, and so on, if a living relationship, built upon trust, exists between them all. And this can only thrive where spiritual love reigns. This takes time and effort, and can be costly. The benefits, however, are enormous. We invent institutions because we want the benefits without the difficulties. We need institutions, of course, but institutions can never make up for the need and lack of grace. In fact, they can get in the way of grace.

And institutionalism abounds among us. Sadly, it is not unknown for the pastor to be content if the members attend, as grateful spectators, the delivery of his sermon, and, after the midweek sermon, take part in public prayer, largely for the success of his preaching. This seems to be the sum total of what is expected

¹¹ Spurgeon: *New* Vol.3 pp268-269. See also my quotation of the letter printed in the *Evangelical Times*.

¹² Eastwood: *Believers* pp50-51.

The All-Body Ministry

of them – or, in many cases, welcomed from them. The members must open their spiritual mouths to be spoon-fed, but not to contribute to any form of teaching ministry. They are to be receivers, but not givers, mere sponges absorbing preaching delivered from the pulpit. It brings to mind misguided famine relief which encourages the hungry to depend on hand-outs, instead of producing men and women who can feed themselves. If you give a man a fish, you feed him for a day, and encourage him to stand in the queue, with his hand out, for more of the same tomorrow. If you give him a fishing rod or net, and teach him how to fish, you enable him to feed himself and his family for the rest of his life.

Churches which have little or no concept of the priesthood of all believers, but have a corresponding unbiblical emphasis upon ‘the pastor’ who retains the sole prerogative of teaching, effectively stifle the apostolic practice of Ephesians 4:7,11-16. They lose, they neglect, the New Testament emphasis; namely, what should be the expectation of the members – more, the *demand* of the members – to be edified by the stated teaching ministry with a view, not simply to absorbing more and more facts, but to be fired up to engage in mutual edification, and to equip them for it. And everybody – both pastor and people – are much the poorer for it. How stimulating it would be for the pastor, for instance, if his sermon was met with enthusiastic curiosity, a barrage of questions, interesting suggestions, and animated conversation between the members! Or, calamity of calamities, if someone should disturb the sermon by responding from the floor! Grievously, the man has usually stood six feet above question, let alone contradiction.

This is what I mean by saying that when we do not exercise the priesthood of all believers as we should, we weaken the power of stated preaching.

Let me offer some evidence to support my case. Take the apostolic discourses as recorded in Acts. Do we not get the sense that these discourses were marked by interruptions and responses from the hearers? It would seem that such a reaction was not unknown or unwelcome in those days (Acts 2:37-41; 13:42-48; 26:24). Again, we know that when he preached, Paul ‘reasoned’ with his hearers (Acts 17:2,17; 18:4,19; 19:8-9; 20:7; 24:25; 26:24-29; 28:23-29); that is, he disputed with them, discussed with them,

The All-Body Ministry

discoursed with them, argued with them. Here again, we have this sense of two-way traffic. As for his letters, they abound with questions, clearly giving the very strong impression that he can picture an opponent at his side raising objection after objection – which he stops to answer. To cite passages would be superfluous. If this is so – and I think the evidence is irrefutable – surely when he stood before a congregation, he would have expected something of the sort to happen, would he not?

I think, therefore, it is fair to say that when the New Testament preachers preached, they were met – not with a silent, acquiescent audience – but with a definite reaction. If unbelievers were present, they would, from time to time, object. And the believers, curious and eager, would want answers to their questions. Anything more in contrast to a semi-comatose, funereal assembly, would be hard to imagine. The meetings in these early days were alive, and things happened! Read again 1 Corinthians 14. Stripping away the excesses, we are left with a picture of vibrant curiosity, eagerness to participate and an insatiable demand for answers to questions. I am sure that, as the meeting broke up, the teachers were not dampened with inane comments about the weather!

Just in case it needs saying, when I advocate this stimulating, disputing atmosphere, I am not saying that preaching is nothing more than debate. Not at all. It is not a debate at all, in the usual sense of the word. The preacher must speak with authority, he is the teacher, and he must exercise a grip on the hearers. But the idea that a congregation is perpetually passive and silent under an unbroken monologue is, I am sure, foreign to the New Testament.

Again, I do not want anybody to run away with the idea that preaching is all about the mind, mental stimulus and such like. The truth has to penetrate the man through the mind, yes, but the end result must be the glory of God in practical obedience (Rom. 6:17; Jas. 2:14-26; 1 John, for instance).

In all this, I am saying that New Testament preaching and teaching requires the proper implementation of the priesthood of all believers.

‘But wait a minute’, someone says. ‘Where your recipe has been tried, the one sure-fire result has been to diminish the stated ministry’.

The All-Body Ministry

Let me respond at once. Sadly, I have to admit, very often this has been the result. And this is to make an error as bad as the first. But it need not be – it should not be – nor will it be – if the entire biblical package (it is not *my recipe*) is adopted. Nothing I have said in any way diminishes the role of the stated teacher – men whom God has especially called and equipped for the work of teaching. How can it, if it is – as I have shown – biblical? Both principles – an all-body ministry, and a stated ministry – are equally biblical. Each feeds off the other. Each requires the other. They are symbiotic. Therefore, when both are carried out properly, the one must complement the other.

But I do not minimise the difficulties. Indeed, I go further. I have to confess that Eastwood was right: ‘No single church has been able to express in its worship, work and witness, the full richness of this doctrine’ of the priesthood of all believers.¹³ Nevertheless, let us try. Biblical church life is difficult. In fact, I believe that one of the drivers behind the popularity of ‘the pastor’ system is that, superficially at least, it makes life easier. But I cannot recall a text urging us to alter God’s word to make things simple for us.

Yes, what I am proposing is full of snags, snares and pitfalls. Satan knows them better than we do! And he won’t doze the time away. He will try to lull us to sleep, but he won’t make that mistake for himself. In one way or another, he will do what he can to spoil New Testament church life. It is bound to be. But the same could be said of every biblical principle, worked out by fallen men and women. What else should we expect? Of course it is not easy to recognise a man as gifted by the Spirit as a stated teacher, and to pay him for his labours, and do it without turning him into an icon. Of course it is not easy for each believer to recognise that he is gifted in a measure by the Spirit, and has a duty to exercise that gift and competence, without falling foul of the apostle’s rebuke of the excesses of 1 Corinthians 14. Of course it is altogether too easy for a man who is paid as a regular teacher among God’s people to find the money corrosive – to the extent of warping his judgement, clouding his eye and stilling his tongue – or at least trimming it.

¹³ Eastwood: *Believers* p238.

The All-Body Ministry

Yes, New Testament life is difficult. Whoever thought it was easy? But doesn't James 4:6 have the answer? God 'gives us more grace'. Do not miss the 'more'. Note the number of references to 'God giving his people grace' at the opening and closing of most of the New Testament books (Rom. 1:7; 16:20; 1 Cor. 1:3; 16:23; 2 Cor. 1:2; 13:14; Gal. 1:3; 6:18; Eph. 1:2; 6:24; Phil. 1:2; 4:23; Col. 1:2; 4:18; 1 Thess. 1:1; 5:28; 2 Thess. 1:2; 3:18; 1 Tim. 1:2; 6:21; 2 Tim. 1:2; 4:22; Tit. 1:4; 3:15; Philem. 3,25; Heb. 13:25; 1 Pet. 1:2; 2 Pet. 1:2; 3:18; 2 John 3; Rev. 1:4; 22:21). Such expressions are not 'apostolic padding' or sentimental makeweights!

By getting back to the New Testament, we would get rid of the present cult of men, and replace it with the biblical estimate of the church. Surely that is a purpose worth striving for? This is what I am writing for. That is why I appeal to you, my reader, to reform your thinking more and more to Scripture, and to do what you can to get your local church to come as close as possible to the New Testament. In saying this, I do not mean only in order, of course. I mean also in life and love. Let us begin to take the priesthood of all believers – with its corollary, an all-body ministry – seriously. Let us put it to work! We will make mistakes, no doubt, but the biggest mistake of all would be to go on as though the priesthood of all believers has little or no practical consequence for the life of the church.