

unorganized and powerless. And unfortunately, it's a tough mindset to change.

Howard Snyder says in *Liberating the Church* that most church members "expect doctors to treat us, not to train us to treat others. We expect lawyers to give us expert advice, not to admit us to the secret fraternity of those who understand how the legal system works. Likewise, we want pastors to serve us, not to 'build and train us' to serve others."

It must break God's heart when people come to church with a consumer mindset, content to eat and run. "Serve me," they say. "Teach me. Pray for me. Fix my kids. Counsel my spouse. And if you don't do all of this up to my standards, I'll go down the street and see if another church will pay better attention to me." **It's impossible to build a God-honoring church with a congregation full of consumers.**

Neither can you build a God-honoring church without teachers, leaders and pastors committed to equipping. When those called to equip think of themselves as the only worthy "doers of ministry," when they peer down from their perches in the pulpit at their congregations, convinced that the Holy Spirit could not possibly work through the people seated in front of them, they are directly disobeying their callings and mandates from God.

Passages paraphrased from
The Volunteer Revolution
by Bill Hybels, pp. 59-66

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*"Riverside exists so that people will
find and follow Jesus."*

What, Me A Priest?

Before the coming of Christ, the Holy Spirit operated through a select group of people called priests. Aaron, the brother of Moses, served as the first priest, and his sons carried on the priesthood.

Old Testament priests mediated affairs between God and the people. To do anything religiously—pray, give a worship offering, confess his/her sins—the average person couldn't go directly to God; he or she had to go through a priest.

But Jesus' life and death turned that system inside out. On what we now call the Day of Pentecost when the first Christ-followers gathered in the “the upper room,” they heard the sound of a sudden rushing wind. Then tongues of fire landed on everyone's head. These tongues represented the coming of the Holy Spirit in full measure to the church. And the tongues sat not on the heads of a select few, but on *everybody's* head. From that moment on, instead of a few, select priests filled and empowered by the Holy Spirit to act as go-betweens with God, suddenly every one of Jesus' followers became a priest.

This means that today we have direct access to God. We don't have to call a priest or pastor every time we want to worship, pray or confess our sins to God. It also means that we become priests to one another. And what does a faithful priest do for his people? Prays for them. Encourages them. Watches

them. Confronts them. Grieves with those who grieve. Rejoices with those who rejoice. As a result, the people feel loved, nurtured, secure and blessed.

Imagine a community in which every member takes his or her priesthood as seriously as did the priests of the Old Testament. A community like that would turn the world upside down!

According to Ephesians 4:11-12, God has uniquely equipped some of these priestly servants to train others how to serve: “It was he (Jesus) who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, *to prepare God's people for works of service*, so that the body of Christ may be built up.”

Instead of the Old Testament temple system, **we have congregations full of priests**, with a few teachers, leaders and pastors among the priesthood who are called to equip those priests for ministry. In most modern church settings, the “equipping servants” would be paid pastors and staff members. Those equipped to carry out the good works of ministry would be the “volunteers.”

The Train Jumps the Tracks

It's hard to define exactly how or when the church train jumped tracks, but jump it did. Although the early church started out with this beautiful concept of the priesthood of all believers—with every member an active minister, and good works carried forth in all directions—during the last couple of centuries, most churches have retreated to the

Old Testament model. Here's how it often plays out:

A group of a hundred people get together, decide to form a congregation and “hire a minister.” That's the terminology they use: hire a minister. Then they say to their new minister, “Okay, this is what we want you to do: Preach. Teach. Marry. Bury. Make hospital calls. Visit members. Counsel the confused. Evangelize the community. Raise money. Print the bulletins. Do announcements. Pray for the sick. Then come year end, we'll get out our report cards and determine whether you have met our expectations. If you have, we'll sign you up to another year. If not, we'll hire someone else.”

If the hired minister energetically throws himself into his multitude of tasks, and the church starts to grow, the congregation might hire an associate pastor, an administrative pastor or a youth pastor to take care of the programs and people beyond the senior minister's reach. Again, the congregation pays “the clergy” to do ministry.

So the church ends up with a few overworked professionals, paid by the tithes and offerings of the congregation, to fulfill the whole gamut of priestly functions while everybody else remains passive observers, their gifts and talents atrophying from disuse.

This is the most widely practiced ministry paradigm in existence today—**and it doesn't have a shred of biblical support**. Tragically, this approach has left many contemporary churches in shambles: weak,