

STUDY ON THE BOOK OF FIRST PETER
GOD'S CHOSEN PEOPLE AND THE WORD!

Read 1 Peter 1:22 – 2:8

The Necessity of Love to accompany Holiness.

“Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever, because “All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, and its flower falls away, but the word of the Lord endures forever.” Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you.” (vv1:22-25)

Holy living is incomplete if it is not accompanied by love. To be a Christian means to have a sincere love of the brethren, but we are encouraged to exercise that love fervently. Such love is only possible (and only to be expected) of those who have been born again by the eternal word of God.

Again, Peter did not use the same wording for born again as is found in John 3; but he did use the exact same idea which doesn't only give us new life. It also tells us to love one another. If the word of God is as Isaiah 40:8 says it is — the word of the Lord which endures forever, then we are both obligated by it and empowered by it, to live out the kind of love and holiness Peter speaks of.

Peter here quoted from Isaiah 40:6-8. The word of the LORD certainly has endured. It has survived centuries of manual transcription, of persecution, of ever changing philosophies, of all kinds of critics, of neglect both in the pulpit and in the pew, of doubt and disbelief — and still, the word of the LORD endures forever!

Since this eternal, always potentially fruit-bearing seed is in us, we have both the obligation and the ability to have a sincere love of the brethren. Perhaps we could say that if we need more love towards others it begins with having more of the incorruptible seed set in our hearts and allowed to grow. Some people try to draw a sharp distinction between the two Greek words most often translated word, which are the ancient Greek words *rhema* and *logos*. But here Peter used both words (*logos* in 1 Peter 1:23 and *rhema* in 1 Peter 1:25) to refer to the exact same idea. The two words sometimes have subtle differences, but often not significant differences.

How to respond to the eternal word of God.

“Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious.” (vv2:1-3)

Peter starts this chapter with the word “therefore”, which means - considering what God's word is to us, we should receive the word and receive it with a particular heart. The word “desire” is strong. In the Septuagint (an ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament) it is used for man's deepest longing for God: *As the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for You, O God (Psalm 42:1)*. It speaks of the desire each believer should have for the word of God.

A healthy new baby has an instinctive yearning for its mother's milk. When things are right, you don't have to tell it to want the milk. The failure to either desire or to receive this pure milk of the word is the reason for so many problems in both individual Christian lives and in congregations. The Word of God is necessary for the growth of the Christian. We should all “desire the pure milk of the word”, even though

Paul rebukes the Corinthians for being able to only receive milk (1 Corinthians 3:1-2), the Christian should never get tired of the simple truths of the Gospel simply presented.

“Laying aside all malice, guile, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking” means the attitude of heart that receives the word and grows by the word. This is a humble, honest heart, willing to do what the Word of God says. The phrase “evil speaking” is an ancient Greek word that has more of the idea of spicy and hurtful gossip than the idea of profane speech.

If we have received from God and have tasted (personally experienced) that the Lord is gracious, then we have great reason and responsibility to receive the word in the enthusiastic way that babies receive their milk.

Living Stones in a Spiritual Temple

“Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” (vv2:4-5)

Peter’s picture here is that God is building a spiritual temple (a spiritual house) using living stones (Christians), those who have come to the ultimate living stone (Jesus). “House of God” is often used in the Bible as the tabernacle, and later, the temple. Notice how the “Living Stone” here refers to Jesus the Messiah. We also “like living stones” are built into a spiritual temple. This theme of Christians being collectively the temple of God built upon Jesus, the chief cornerstone, is found elsewhere in the New Testament. “Built up” is the Greek verb *oikodomeō*, “to construct a building, build.” Jesus spoke this same word to Peter when he said, “I will build my church!” (Matthew 16:18).

A Holy Priesthood

Though it was God's initial desire that all his chosen people, the Jews, might be priests (Exodus 19:5-6), their fear of God was not met with faith, so they asked God not to speak to them directly (Exodus 20:19), but through Moses. Apparently, as a result, an order of priesthood was set up, starting with Aaron, Moses' brother, his sons, and their descendants. The priests acted as mediators between the people and the holy God, assisting with the sacrifices and presenting them before the Lord. It was a high and holy calling.

But in the New Testament, God chooses a new people, a people of faith, and once more calls us all to be priests. “Priesthood,” which appears here and in verse 9, is the Greek noun *hierateuma*. A “royal priesthood” means “a priesthood of royal rank or in royal service” and refers to Exodus 19:6; 23:22.

Therefore, as much as God chose Israel, so the church is also chosen. As much as Israel had a priesthood, so Christians are a holy priesthood. And as much as Israel had sacrifices, so Christians offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God. God does the work of building (being built), but we do the job of offering sacrifices pleasing to Him, as we come to Jesus as who we are — living stones, made by Him.

Two critical points here:

1. Even a living stone cannot build something great for God as it sits all on its own. What God does in us together is important. He is building something out of us together.
2. We can only serve as priests as we do it through Jesus Christ. In ourselves, we have no priestly authority, but only in Jesus.

What Is Spiritual Worship or Spiritual Sacrifices?

Just what kinds of offerings do we offer to God? Here is an enlightening though incomplete list.

1. **Obedience.** When we obey God in the way we live, we worship God. *"Offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God -- this is your spiritual act of worship"* (Romans 12:1) Jesus made it clear that he desires not just outward obedience, but obedience from the heart (Matthew 6:1-5). The Psalmist captures this idea so well! *"May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, my Strength and my Redeemer."* (Psalm 19:14)
2. **Financial Gifts.** *"I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the things sent from you, a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God."* (Philippians 4:18. See also 2:17 which refers to the Philippians' offerings.) *"But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased."* (Hebrews 13:16)
3. **Proclaiming the Gospel.** Paul talks about his call *"I might be a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering (Greek prosphora) of the Gentiles might be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit."* (Romans 15:16).
4. **Praise.** *"Therefore, by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name."* (Hebrews 13:15). This last verse paraphrases an Old Testament passage: *"Take words with you and return to the Lord. Say to Him, "take away all iniquity; receive us graciously, for we will offer the sacrifices of our lips."* (Hosea 14:2).

Rejecting the Messiah

"Therefore, it is also contained in the Scripture, "Behold, I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone, elect, precious, and he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame." Therefore, to you who believe, He is precious; but to those who are disobedient, "The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone," and "a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense." They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed." (vv2:6-8)

If we are being built into a spiritual house, there is no doubt who our Chief Cornerstone is. Even though men rejected Jesus, He has become the Chief Cornerstone in the work of building the church. Jesus Christ is the cornerstone of Psalm 118, the stumbling stone of Isaiah 8, the foundation stone of Isaiah 28, the supernatural stone of Daniel 2, and the rock that miraculously gave Israel water in the wilderness (1 Corinthians 10:4).

Though this chief cornerstone is rejected by the disobedient and unbelieving, undeniably He is precious to those who believe. One way to know if a person has truly Biblical faith is to see if Jesus is truly precious to them. How precious is Jesus to you?

Those who reject the Chief Cornerstone and refuse to build on Him instead stumble over Him. Instead of being their salvation, Jesus becomes to them a rock of offense.

- a) Jesus quoted this passage from Psalm 118 in regard to Himself (Matthew 21:42). A chief cornerstone is the starting point of a building; everything is laid out according to its connection to the chief cornerstone. Because it stands at the corner, the same stone is the starting place for two walls.

- b) Thus, Jesus set out the course for both Jew and Gentile to be joined together into one glorious house for God. This in itself was a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense for the Jews, who thought that Gentiles should not have equal share with the Jews into God's great house.
- c) In the thinking of many Jews of that time, God should not have built a new building with both Jew and Gentile. He should have simply renovated the present structure of Judaism (adding Jesus as the Messiah) and invited Gentiles to come into that structure. But God did something different, and it was a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense for many first-century Jews.
- d) Therefore, these great titles of 1 Peter 2:9-10 now apply to all believers, Jew and Gentile alike; whereas before they only applied to the Jewish people as God's covenant people.

It is appointed that those who are disobedient to the word should stumble over Jesus. When Jesus spoke of Himself as the stone of Psalm 118, He spoke of what those who rejected Him are appointed to: *“And whoever falls on this stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder.”* (Matthew 21:44)

The privileged place of God's people.

“But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.” (vv10-11)

The things that once exclusively belonged to Israel — their election (chosen), priesthood, and calling are now no longer the property of Israel alone. These are now the property of every Christian, and we have them in a greater and spiritual sense. We are a royal priesthood. The offices of royalty and priesthood were jealously separated in Israel. But Jesus, who is our King and Priest, has brought them together for His people.

We are special because we belong to God. A museum may be filled with quite ordinary things: hats, canes, shoes, and so forth; but they may be significant because they once belonged to someone famous. God takes ordinary people; and because He works in them, they are special. These same titles were applied to Israel (Exodus 19:5-6, Deuteronomy 4:20, Deuteronomy 7:6, and Isaiah 43:20-21). Now in Jesus we belong to God as His own special people.

We once were without these privileges and were not even a people before God. We had not seen the mercy of God, but now have obtained mercy. In our culture, with its Christian foundations, we don't easily understand the great sense of privilege and relief that came to Gentiles as they were shared in the New Covenant with the God of Israel. Peter's message is wonderful: *“You didn't used to belong, but now you belong to God and among God's people.”*

The purpose for these high privileges is not so we can grow proud, but so that we can proclaim the praises of Him who has done such great things for us. Since it is true that believers have a new life principle (chosen generation), a new access to God (royal priesthood), a new government (holy nation), and a new owner (His own special people), it will affect the way the believer lives life. That effect is described in the verses that follow and we will study that next week.