

I Peter 2:4-10
February 26, 2017

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Last week Peter directly addressed the fact that the believers scattered in northern Asia Minor had developed sinful attitudes. He knew that as long as they were feeding negativity in their hearts and minds, they were not going to be spiritually healthy. In fact, he exhorted them to grow in their salvation. To that end, Peter shared some action steps with them to point them in the right direction that we should incorporate in our own lives. We learned to rid ourselves of malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy and slander of every kind if we are to expect spiritual growth. We also explored Peter's metaphor that "like newborn babes, we should crave pure spiritual milk" so that his readers would grow in their salvation.

Transition: Today, Peter now moves to a new metaphor to inspire his readers to grow spiritually through holy living. I again invite us to pay attention to his writing because **each of us CAN facilitate our spiritual growth BY implementing the action STEPS Peter suggests in his letter.** Let's begin.

BOOK (NIV 1984): [Read I Peter 2:4-10]

V.4:

- As you **come to him**, the living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him—

V.5:

- you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, **offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.**

V.6:

- For in Scripture it says: "See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame."

V.7:

- Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, "The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone,"

V.8:

- and, "A stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall." They stumble because they disobey the message—which is also what they were destined for.

V.9:

- But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may **declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.**

V.10:

- Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Process Questions:

Q V.4-8: What is the metaphor Peter describes to his readers? [You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. There is only one Saviour, Jesus Christ, and only one spiritual building, the church. Jesus Christ is the chief cornerstone of the church (Eph. 2:20), binding the building together. Peter wrote this letter to believers living in five different provinces, yet he said that they all belonged to *one* “spiritual house.” There is a unity of God’s people that transcends all local and individual assemblies and fellowships. We belong to each other because we belong to Christ.]

Q V.4: What action step does Peter offer in this verse? [**Come to Jesus** – if we are going to grow spiritually, we need to draw closer to Jesus. Move toward Him!]

Observation: “Come to Jesus” seems obvious, but when we don’t draw to Him regularly, why would expect to spiritually grow?

Q V.5: Peter describes us as “living stones.” What is the Lord doing with each of us? [building us into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood]

Q: I realize that most of us probably don’t visualize ourselves as living stones on a regular basis, but this is a wonderful word picture of how Jesus sees all of His children come together to form His church.

Q: Think about it. If he wants to use every believer to build the spiritual house, what does that say about *your importance* in the body of Christ? [We are each valued; we weren’t created to be lone ranger Christians; the Lord sees us more effective together than apart.]

Q V.5: Peter gives another action step in this word picture? What is it? [**offering spiritual sacrifices**]

Q: Since we aren’t bringing animals for sacrifices, what do our spiritual sacrifices look like? [We ought to give *our bodies* to Him as living sacrifices (Rom. 12:1–2), as well as the *praise* of our lips (Heb. 13:15) and the *good works* we do for others (Heb. 13:16). The *money* and other material things we share with others in God’s service is also a spiritual sacrifice (Phil. 4:14–18).]

V. 6 Christ as the Cornerstone: A cornerstone is the visible support on which the rest of the building relies for strength and stability. Believers are to trust in Christ much as a building rests on its cornerstone. (Peter is referencing Isa 28:16, Eph 2:20)

Q V.7-8: These two verses present a sharp contrast between those who believe and those who don’t. How is Christ described for those who don’t believe? [Capstone and a stumbling block]

Q: What’s a “capstone?” [It’s a stone fixed on top of something, typically a wall. Archaeologists say it’s a flat stone forming a roof over the chamber of a megalithic tomb.]

Q: What is a “stumbling stone?” [Have you ever heard the phrase “stumbling block?” It is literally a concrete cube, but when we read this phrase in Scripture it is a figurative phrase.]

Q: When you look at the truth that Jesus is both a capstone and stumbling block to those who don't believe, what is message Peter is sending? [Peter is conveying a solemn warning for those who reject Christ. The rejection of Jesus is fatal. It will translate to eternal separation from God.]

Q V.9-10: Peter closes this portion of his letter with encouragement. What does he want his readers to remember? [They are a **chosen** people, a **royal** priesthood, a **holy** nation, a people belonging to God]

Observation: This is a powerful description of who we are in God's eyes. We are a "holy priesthood" and a "royal priesthood." This corresponds to the heavenly priesthood of our Lord, for He is both King and Priest (see Heb. 7). In the Old Testament, no king in Israel served as a priest. In the Old Testament period, **God's people had a priesthood; but today, God's people are a priesthood.** Each individual believer has the privilege of coming into the presence of God (Heb. 10:19–25). We do not come to God through any person on earth, but only through the one Mediator, Jesus Christ (1 Tim. 2:1–8). Because He is alive in glory, interceding for us, we can minister as holy priests.

Q: Given that Jesus describes us as a kingdom of priests, what do you think His expectation is of us? [That we would be a spiritual influence for godliness, which we can accomplish daily. We can choose to be a positive spiritual influence in every interaction we have. If what we say and do draws people closer to Jesus or brings glory to God, we are being a "kingdom of priests" who declare His praises. **God's purpose in choosing believers, you and me, for Himself is so that we may declare the praises of Him!** "Praises" can also mean excellencies or "virtues."]

Transition: Before we move to the next section of this letter, I want us to "zoom out" and be reminded that Peter is still offering some action steps to help his readers to grow spiritually. He has exhorted them to "come to Jesus," "offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God," and to "declare the praises of Him." If we do these things on a daily basis, then we will grow spiritually because we are actively working out our faith.

Now Peter turns his attention to *our Christian conduct* in the life of a believer. Given that we are His chosen people, a holy nation, a royal priesthood, a people belonging to God, there are certain responsibilities that come with this kind of privilege. Let's review them and make sure we understand what is required of us.

LOOK:

It is important that we, as God's priests, maintain our separated position in this world. We must not be isolated, because the world needs our influence and witness; but we must not permit the world to infect us or change us. Separation is not isolation; it is contact without contamination.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Vol. 2, pp. 400-403). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

We Are Stones in the Same Building (1 Peter 2:4–8)

There is only one Saviour, Jesus Christ, and only one spiritual building, the church. Jesus Christ is the chief cornerstone of the church (Eph. 2:20), binding the building together. Whether we agree with each other or not, all true Christians belong to each other as stones in God's building.

Peter gave a full description of Jesus Christ, the stone. He is a *living* stone because He was raised from the dead in victory. He is the *chosen* stone of the Father, and He is *precious*. Peter quoted Isaiah 28:16 and Psalm 118:22 in his description and pointed out that Jesus Christ, though chosen by God, was rejected by men. He was not the kind of Messiah they were expecting, so they stumbled over Him. Jesus referred to this same Scripture when He debated with the Jewish leaders (Matt. 21:42ff; see Ps. 118:22). Though rejected by men, Jesus Christ was exalted by God!

The real cause of this Jewish stumbling was their refusal to submit to the Word (1 Peter 2:8). Had they believed and obeyed the Word, they would have received their Messiah and been saved. Of course, people today still stumble over Christ and His cross (1 Cor. 1:18ff). Those who believe on Christ "shall not be confounded [ashamed]."

In His first mention of the church, Jesus compared it to a building: "I will build My church" (Matt. 16:18). Believers are living stones in His building. Each time someone trusts Christ, another stone is quarried out of the pit of sin and cemented by grace into the building. It may look to us that the church on earth is a pile of rubble and ruins, but God sees the total structure as it grows (Eph. 2:19–22). What a privilege we have to be a part of His church, "an habitation of God through the Spirit."

Peter wrote this letter to believers living in five different provinces, yet he said that they all belonged to *one* "spiritual house." There is a unity of God's people that transcends all local and individual assemblies and fellowships. We belong to each other because we belong to Christ. This does not mean that doctrinal and denominational distinctives are wrong, because each local church must be fully persuaded by the Spirit. But it does mean that we must not permit our differences to destroy the spiritual unity we have in Christ. We ought to be mature enough to disagree without in any sense becoming disagreeable.

A contractor in Michigan was building a house and the construction of the first floor went smoothly. But when they started on the second floor, they had nothing but trouble. None of the materials from the lumberyard would fit properly. Then they discovered the reason: they were working with two different sets of blueprints! Once they got rid of the old set, everything went well and they built a lovely house.

Too often, Christians hinder the building of the church because they are following the wrong plans. When Solomon built his temple, his workmen followed the plans so carefully that everything fit together on the construction site (1 Kings 6:7). If all of us would follow God's blueprints given in His Word, we would be able to work together without discord and build His church for His glory.

We Are Priests in the Same Temple (1 Peter 2:5, 9)

We are a “holy priesthood” and a “royal priesthood.” This corresponds to the heavenly priesthood of our Lord, for He is both King and Priest (see Heb. 7). In the Old Testament, no king in Israel served as a priest; and the one king who tried was judged by God (2 Chron. 26:16–21). Our Lord’s heavenly throne is a throne of grace from which we may obtain by faith all that we need to live for Him and serve Him (Heb. 4:14–16).

In the Old Testament period, God’s people *had* a priesthood; but today, God’s people *are* a priesthood. Each individual believer has the privilege of coming into the presence of God (Heb. 10:19–25). We do not come to God through any person on earth, but only through the one Mediator, Jesus Christ (1 Tim. 2:1–8). Because He is alive in glory, interceding for us, we can minister as holy priests.

This means that our lives should be lived as though we were priests in a temple. It is indeed a privilege to serve as a priest. No man in Israel could serve at the altar, or enter the tabernacle or temple holy places, except those born into the tribe of Levi and consecrated to God for service. Each priest and Levite had different ministries to perform, yet they were together under the high priest, serving to glorify God. As God’s priests today, we must work together at the direction of our Great High Priest. Each ministry that we perform for His glory is a service to God.

Peter mentioned especially the privilege of offering “spiritual sacrifices.” Christians today do not bring animal sacrifices as did the Old Testament worshipers; but we do have our own sacrifices to present to God. We ought to give *our bodies* to Him as living sacrifices (Rom. 12:1–2), as well as the *praise* of our lips (Heb. 13:15) and the *good works* we do for others (Heb. 13:16). The *money* and other material things we share with others in God’s service is also a spiritual sacrifice (Phil. 4:10–20). Even the *people* we win to Christ are sacrifices for His glory (Rom. 15:16). We offer these sacrifices through Jesus Christ, for only then are they acceptable with God. If we do any of this for our own pleasure or glory, then it will not be accepted as a spiritual sacrifice.

God wanted His people Israel to become “a kingdom of priests” (Ex. 19:6), a spiritual influence for godliness; but Israel failed Him. Instead of being a positive influence on the godless nations around them, Israel imitated those nations and adopted their practices. God had to discipline His people many times for their idolatry, but they still persisted in sin. Today, Israel has no temple or priesthood.

It is important that we, as God’s priests, maintain our separated position in this world. We must not be isolated, because the world needs our influence and witness; but we must not permit the world to infect us or change us. Separation is not isolation; it is contact without contamination.

The fact that each individual believer can go to God personally and offer spiritual sacrifices should not encourage selfishness or “individualism” on our part. We are priests *together*, serving the same High Priest, ministering in the same spiritual temple. The fact that there is but *one* High Priest and heavenly Mediator indicates unity among the people of God. While we must maintain our personal walk with God, we must not do it at the expense of other Christians by ignoring or neglecting them.

Several social scientists have written books dealing with what they call the “me complex” in modern society. The emphasis today is on taking care of yourself and forgetting about others. This same attitude has crept into the church, as I see it. Too much modern church music centers on the individual and ignores the fellowship of the church. Many books and sermons focus on *personal* experience to the neglect of ministry to the whole body. I realize that the individual must care for himself if he is to help others, but there must be balance.

We Are Citizens of the Same Nation (1 Peter 2:9–10)

The description of the church in these verses parallels God's description of Israel, in Exodus 19:5–6 and Deuteronomy 7:6. In contrast to the disobedient and rebellious nation of Israel, God's people today are His chosen and holy nation. This does not suggest that God is through with Israel, for I believe He will fulfill His promises and His covenants and establish the promised kingdom. But it does mean that the church today is to God and the world what Israel was meant to be.

We are a *chosen generation*, which immediately speaks of the grace of God. God did not choose Israel because they were a great people, but because He loved them (Deut. 7:7–8). God has chosen us purely because of His love and grace. “You did not choose Me, but I chose you” (John 15:16).

We are a *holy nation*. We have been set apart to belong exclusively to God. Our citizenship is in heaven (Phil. 3:20), so we obey heaven's laws and seek to please heaven's Lord. Israel forgot that she was a holy nation and began to break down the walls of separation that made her special and distinct. God commanded them to put a “difference between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean” (Lev. 10:10); but they ignored the differences and disobeyed God.

We are the *people of God*. In our unsaved condition, we were not God's people, because we belonged to Satan and the world (Eph. 2:1–3, 11–19). Now that we have trusted Christ, we are a part of God's people. We are a “people of His own special possession,” because He purchased us with the blood of His own Son (Acts 20:28).

All of these privileges carry with them one big responsibility: revealing the praises of God to a lost world. The verb translated “show forth” means “to tell out, to advertise.” Because the world is “in the dark,” people do not know the “excellencies” of God; but they should see them in our lives. Each citizen of heaven is a living “advertisement” for the virtues of God and the blessings of the Christian life. Our lives should radiate the “marvelous light” into which God has graciously called us.

After all, we have obtained mercy from God! Were it not for His mercy, we would be lost and on the way to eternal judgment! God reminded Israel many times that He had delivered them from the bondage of Egypt that they might glorify and serve Him, but the nation soon forgot and the people drifted back into their sinful ways. We are God's chosen people only because of His mercy, and it behooves us to be faithful to Him.

We are living in enemy territory, and the enemy is constantly watching us, looking for opportunities to move in and take over. As citizens of heaven, we must be united. We must present to the world a united demonstration of what the grace and mercy of God can do. As I write these words, the newspapers are reporting “dissensions” among the men who serve with the President of the United States. These men are not presenting a united front, and the nation is a bit uneasy. I wonder what the unsaved people think when they see the citizens of heaven and servants of God fighting among themselves.

Each of these four pictures emphasizes the importance of unity and harmony. We belong to one family of God and share the same divine nature. We are living stones in one building and priests serving in one temple. We are citizens of the same heavenly homeland. It is Jesus Christ who is the source and center of this unity. If we center our attention and affection on Him, we will walk and work together; if we focus on ourselves, we will only cause division.

Unity does not eliminate diversity. Not all children in a family are alike, nor are all the stones in a building identical. In fact, it is diversity that gives beauty and richness to a family or

building. The absence of diversity is not *unity*; it is *uniformity*, and uniformity is dull. It is fine when the choir sings in unison, but I prefer that they sing in harmony.

Christians can differ and still get along. All who cherish the “one faith” and who seek to honor the “one Lord” can love each other and walk together (Eph. 4:1–6). God may call us into different ministries, or to use different methods, but we can still love each other and seek to present a united witness to the world.

St. Augustine said it perfectly: “In essentials, unity. In nonessentials, liberty. In all things, charity.”

Raymer, R. M. (1985). 1 Peter. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures (Vol. 2, pp. 844-847). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

4. THE PRACTICE (2:4–10)

Peter then used a new metaphor in his exhortation to holy living. His readers, having purified themselves, were ready for the practice or ministry of holiness. No longer babies, they were to grow up together to offer spiritual sacrifices as a chosen “royal priesthood.”

2:4. **As you come to Him** does not refer to the initial response of a sinner who comes to Christ for salvation. The participle’s tense and voice indicate that this coming is a personal, habitual approach. It is an intimate association of communion and fellowship between believers and their Lord.

The first step in practicing holiness is fellowship with Jesus Christ, **the living Stone**. Here Peter used a unique figure of speech. In 1:3 he referred to a “living hope” and in 1:23 to the “living ... Word”; then in 2:4 he referred to Christ as “the living Stone.” Peter developed and explained the metaphor of the stone in the following verses. Here he said this Stone is living. It has life in itself and gives life to others. People may enter into personal, vital relationships with this “living Stone.” Whereas Christ was **rejected by men ... God had chosen Him** (cf. 1:20) and held Him **precious** (cf. 1:19; 2:4, 7). Christians rejected by the world may take heart in the knowledge that they are the elect (1:1), valued (1:18) by God.

2:5. Believers are identified with Christ, for He is *the* living Stone and they are **like living stones**. And as they become more like Him, further conformed to His image, they **are being built into a spiritual house**. Jesus told Peter, “On this rock I will build My church” (Matt. 16:18). Now Peter (1 Peter 2:4–5) clearly identified Christ as the Rock on which His church is built. Paul called the church a “temple” (1 Cor. 3:16; Eph. 2:21) and “a dwelling” (Eph. 2:22). Believers not only make up the church but serve in it, ministering as **a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices**. All believers are priests (cf. 1 Peter 2:9; Heb. 4:16; Rev. 1:6) and need no mediator other than Jesus Christ to approach God directly. Such priestly service requires holiness (cf. 1 Peter 1:16, 22). Praise to God and doing good to others are spiritual sacrifices that please Him (Heb. 13:15). However, “living stones” may also offer themselves as “living sacrifices” (Rom. 12:1), **acceptable to God through Jesus Christ**.

2:6. In verses 6–8 Peter marshaled Old Testament support about the stone from three passages. His first source is Isaiah 28:16, where Christ is the **chosen and precious** (cf. “precious” in 1 Peter 1:19; 2:4, 7) **cornerstone**. A cornerstone is the visible support on which the rest of the building relies for strength and stability. Believers trust in Christ much as a building rests on its cornerstone. Moreover, they **will never be put to shame**. The Greek double negative *ou mē* used here in the subjunctive mood indicates an emphatic negative assertion referring to the

future: never indeed will they be shamed. So Peter encouraged his readers with a sure scriptural promise of ultimate victory for those who trust Christ.

2:7–8. These verses present a sharp contrast between those who believe and those who do not. Christ is “precious,” of ultimate value, to those who believe. But those who have **rejected** Christ, the Stone (Peter’s second quotation is from Ps. 118:22) **stumble** because of their disobedience. This happened to the chief priests and Pharisees Jesus referred to when He quoted Psalm 118:22 (Matt. 21:42; cf. 21:43–46).

Peter’s third quotation is from Isaiah 8:14. Rejection of Jesus Christ is fatal and is connected with disobeying **the message** of God’s Word (1 Peter 2:8b). To **disobey** the message (cf. 4:17) is to reject it; and to obey it is to believe (cf. obedience in 1:14, 22 and “obedient to the faith” in Acts 6:7). All who do not receive Christ as their Savior will one day face Him as their Judge. Because of sin, all disobedient unbelievers are **destined for** a “stumbling,” which will lead to eternal condemnation.

2:9–10. Peter closed this portion of his letter of encouragement with a moving exhortation for his readers to practice holiness. He reminded them that, in contrast with the disobedient who are destined for destruction, they were a **chosen** (*eklektion*; cf. “elect,” *eklektois*, 1:1) **people**. Peter again echoed the Old Testament, specifically Isaiah 43:20. “Chosen people,” which used to apply only to Israel, was now used of both Jewish and Gentile believers. The responsibility once solely trusted to the nation of Israel has now, during this Age of Grace, been given to the church. At Sinai, God told Moses to tell the people, “You will be for Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Ex. 19:6). Now believers in the Church Age are called **a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God**. Peter called Christians “a holy priesthood” (1 Peter 2:5) and “a royal priesthood” (2:9; cf. Rev. 1:6). The words “belonging to God” loosely render the words *eis peripoiēsin*, which are literally “unto obtaining or preserving” (also used in Heb. 10:39, where the NIV has “are saved”). Christians are a special people because God has preserved them for Himself. While these descriptions of the church are similar to those used of Israel in the Old Testament, this in no way indicates that the church supplants Israel and assumes the national blessings promised to Israel (and to be fulfilled in the Millennium). Peter just used similar terms to point up similar truths. As Israel was “a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God,” so too believers today are chosen, are priests, are holy, and belong to God. Similarity does not mean identity.

God’s purpose in choosing believers for Himself is so that they may **declare the praises of Him** before others. “Praises” could also be translated “eminent qualities,” “excellencies,” or “virtues” (*aretos*, used only four times in the NT: Phil. 4:8; 1 Peter 2:9; 2 Peter 1:3, 5). Believer-priests should live so that their heavenly Father’s qualities are evident in their lives. They are to serve as witnesses of the glory and grace of God, who called them **out of darkness into His wonderful light**. Peter (1 Peter 2:10) explained this figure with a quotation from Hosea 2:23. “Darkness” refers to the time when his readers were pagans, ignorant of God’s provision of salvation (cf. Col. 1:13), when they were **not a people**, when they **had not received mercy**. His “wonderful light” now illumines **the people of God** because they **have received mercy**. The practice of holiness, in which God’s people serve as a holy and royal priesthood offering spiritual sacrifices and extolling His excellencies, is the proper response to the mercy (cf. 1 Peter 1:3) they have received.