

Unit III: Christians and Sacrifice

Building from the Ground Up

DEVOTIONAL READING: Galatians 3:23-29

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: 1 Peter 2:1-17

PRINT PASSAGE: 1 Peter 2:1-12

KEY VERSE

Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 2:5, KJV)

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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. (1 Peter 2:5, NIV)

Lesson Aims

As a result of experiencing this lesson, you should be able to do the following:

- Argue that Jesus provides a solid foundation and model for sacrificial living.
- Value the faithful life pattern of Christ.
- Enact honorable deeds that glorify God.

*Key Terms

Chosen (verse 4)—Greek: *eklektos* (ek-lek-tos'): selected; by implication, the favorite; elected.

Cornerstone (verse 6)—Greek: *akrogóniaios* (ak-rog-o-nee-ah'-yos): at the extreme angle or corner (of a building); used of Christ; “corner stone” (KJV).

Good (verse 3)—Greek: *chréstos* (khristos-tos'): serviceable; gentle; pleasant; kind; “gracious” (KJV).

Priesthood (verse 5)—Greek: *hierateuma* (hee-er-at'-yoo-mah): clergy; calling; the act or office of priesthood.

Put aside (verse 1)—Greek: *apotithémi* (ap-ot-eeth'-ay-mee): to lay off or aside; renounce; stow away; “laying aside” (KJV); “rid” (NIV).

Salvation (verse 2, NIV)—Greek: *sótéria* (so-tay-ree'-ah): deliverance; welfare; prosperity; preservation; safety.

***(Word Study Supplement—Refer to page 2)**



The Biblical Context

The book bearing the apostle Peter's name was written to offer encouragement to suffering Christians scattered throughout Asia Minor sometime in the last quarter of the first century. The backdrop of Peter's writing is difficult to pin down to one specific era or event. In the first century, there were several smaller-scale persecutions in Asia Minor, and without any identifiable historical names or events mentioned in Peter, complete accuracy is evasive. Nonetheless, it is known that life for early Christians was difficult because of its understanding by the masses as a superstition or superstition as opposed to the imperial religion. It was a difficult time for Christians, and the writer of 1 Peter could identify with them because of his varied experiences with suffering. Peter's purpose extended beyond encouraging his readers to persevere during their suffering but to give instruction on Christian living. In 1 Peter 2, this lesson's scriptural background, Peter specifies what it means to live holy as God's special people in Christ by addressing their identity and expected conduct as a spiritual house and holy priesthood.

Introduction

Building something from the ground up requires a suitable location and the appropriate materials to complete the project. Once an approved site is identified, a foundation is laid on which the proposed building may stand. Foundations are necessary because they provide support, clarity, and stability. If the building project is masonry, a cornerstone must be set in place to ensure that every stone is appropriately aligned. In explaining the believer's relationship with Christ, the metaphor of a building is used in the Bible—with Christ as its foundation and cornerstone and believers as the stones used to erect a spiritual house designed to fulfill God's purposes in the world. The reference to Jesus' being the church's foundation originates from the New Testament, specifically 1 Corinthians 3:10-17. In this metaphoric context, Jesus as the church's foundation refers to the fundamental beliefs and principles functioning as its solid groundwork. Just as a physical structure needs a solid foundation to support it, the church's is Jesus Christ's teachings that guide its doctrine and practices. Hence, the church's existence is based on His life, death, and resurrection.

Jesus is also identified as the church's cornerstone. Builders have used cornerstones since ancient times to construct buildings. They function as the principle stone and are the basis for determining every measurement and aligning everything else. Consequently, as the church's cornerstone, Jesus is its standard of measure and alignment for all that He has commanded and commissioned it to do. However, the building metaphor is incomplete without stones to lay on the foundation and align with the cornerstone. The stones used to build the spiritual house that God is constructing are those who accept Christ and allow themselves to be transformed into His image and become God's dwelling place through the Holy Spirit. Because this spiritual building is God's temple, these "living stones" become a holy priesthood serving in it by offering themselves as living sacrifices pleasing to God, as the apostle Peter explains in 1 Peter 2:1-10.

ANALYSIS OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT

A Spiritual House (1 Peter 2:1-8)

KJV

WHEREFORE LAYING aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings,

2 As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby:

3 If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious.

4 To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious,

5 Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.

6 Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded.

7 Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner,

8 And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed.

NIV

THEREFORE, RID yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind.

2 Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation,

3 now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.

4 As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him—

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.

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.”

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 cornerstone,”

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

Peter concluded 1 Peter 1 by reminding his readers that they experienced a new birth, allowing them to obey the truth, purify themselves, and love one another. However, although their changed lives resulted from God's imperishable word, periodic repentance was necessary. Consequently, regarding their possessing the capacity to love one another, Peter lists five sins that would disrupt their interpersonal relationships if they harbored them: malice, deceit,

hypocrisy, envy, and slander (**verse 1**). Instead of harboring these sins, Peter urged them to replace them with the desire to be nourished by God's Word since they had experienced the goodness of His grace (**verses 2-3**). Like newborn infants need milk to grow, Christians need a regular diet of God's Word to mature spiritually and should intentionally prioritize reading, studying, meditating on, and internalizing it daily. Peter transitions to a new metaphor for believers in **verse 4** to emphasize that their new position in Christ was purposeful. They needed to put their holiness into practice and could do this by coming to the Lord, whom he describes as the "living stone" rejected by humanity but chosen and highly valued by God. To his readers who were experiencing the world's rejection, Peter's description of Christ in this verse was a source of encouragement, reminding them that as He was rejected but chosen and honored by God, so were they.

In **verse 5**, Peter includes believers in this metaphor; they also are living stones made alive by God's grace and set aside for a specific purpose. God was using them (and us now) to build a spiritual house, a new temple for His dwelling place, made up of believers who serve as priests and offer themselves as living sacrifices. Peter quotes Isaiah 28:16 to support his statements regarding Jesus as the living stone and chosen cornerstone (**verse 6**). The cornerstone was the basis for a structure's foundation. Therefore, Christ as the chosen cornerstone is God's spiritual house's perfect foundation, and all who place their trust in Him can be confident in their faith and that believing in Him provides a firm foundation and the assurance that there will not be any future disappointment—nor will they be judged guilty by God when Christ's returns. In **verse 7a**, Peter highlights the positive result of believers' placing their faith in God's chosen cornerstone—they share the honor that God has given Him. However, those refusing to put faith in Christ will stumble over Him (reject Him) because they refuse to obey the Gospel and choose to live lives characterized by disobedience and rebellion against God (**verses 7b-8**). Christians are now God's spiritual house, His temple, with the responsibility of ridding themselves of negative behaviors that are harmful to living holy lives and that disrupt fellowship; they must desire to grow spiritually by regularly intaking and internalizing God's Word, recognizing and embracing Jesus as the honored foundation and cornerstone of their faith, standing firmly on it despite the certainty of rejection, and compassionately witnessing to nonbelievers stumbling over Christ because of the sin in their lives.

Q WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Which of the responsibilities of being a "living stone" in God's spiritual house is the most challenging to your spiritual growth? What steps can you take to master it and mature your faith?

A Royal Priesthood (1 Peter 2:9-12)

KJV

9 But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people;

that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light;

10 Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.

11 Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul;

12 Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation.

NIV

9 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

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.

11 Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul.

12 Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

In these verses, Peter describes the blessings of these living stones in language used to explain the relationship between God and Israel. Those in Christ by faith are a chosen spiritual race—a specific group called out and set apart to be a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and God's special possession exclusively (**verse 9**). God's purpose for forming this holy people was for them to declare His praises in response to their gracious salvation. Peter continues describing the blessings accompanying believers' new identity in **verse 10**. He references Hosea, a prophet whose marriage symbolized God's willingness to forgive unfaithful Israel and extend them His mercy despite their past (see Hosea 2:23). Likewise, believers who belong to God are reconciled to Him and are recipients of His undeserved mercy because of their spiritual transformation. As a result, Peter urges his readers to be in this world but live like citizens of their new residence in God's presence by abstaining from worldly desires warring with their souls (**verse 11**). Believers' transformation requires a "new normal" regarding their daily lifestyles because they are freed from sin's authority. Still, they must intentionally choose to sin less with the Holy Spirit's power and live as if they already reside in their new home.

Further, Peter reminds his readers that publicly living our faith is critical because the world is watching and ready to accuse Christians when they do wrong. Therefore, he urges living exemplary lives among unbelievers to maintain an influential testimony before them that may lead them to glorify God and accept Christ as Savior before He returns (**verse 12**). Our position

as a royal priesthood is more than a blessing to be enjoyed; it is a tremendous responsibility requiring us to embrace our identity in Christ and live in a way that reflects being called out of darkness into salvation's light. Additionally, our remembering our past and the mercy received from God should evoke perpetual praise, gratitude, and commitment to fulfilling His purposes in the world. Finally, believers must strive to develop self-discipline to abstain from giving in to sinful desires that constantly threaten their spiritual well-being. They must also demonstrate integrity by aligning their behavior with their faith as favorable witnesses in the world.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Why must Christians focus on behaving differently from the world, and how does this challenge the faith community's focus and direction today?

A Closing Thought

Peter reminds us that we are living stones in God's sacred space built on Christ as its foundation and cornerstone. The responsibilities of this new identity in Christ include ridding ourselves of actions and attitudes that present a barrier to Christian living and loving one another, and developing the desire to mature in our salvation by intentionally prioritizing a constant diet of God's Word. This new position in Christ also resulted in believers' becoming a royal priesthood, a unique people belonging to God to offer praise and themselves as living sacrifices. Finally, Peter urges us to remember that our citizenship is in heaven, not this world. Therefore, we must avoid giving in to sinful desires at war within us to maintain a positive and influential testimony before a watching world of unbelievers needing salvation before Christ returns.

Your Life

Peter emphasizes the need for positive Christian conduct toward one another, especially in the world, as God's temple and royal priesthood. Therefore, this week and in the future, consider and commit to practicing the spiritual disciplines you need to help you fulfill the awesome responsibilities that your new identity and position in Christ require.

Your World!

The spiritual house that God is building on Christ as its foundation and cornerstone includes the church. So, supposing this is true, consider responding to the following questions to determine how your congregation measures up to fulfilling the responsibilities of being God's temple and priests presently. What changes must be made to "see" unconditional love for one another and those outside the faith community? What are members' responses to attending educational ministries designed to foster their spiritual maturity through studying His Word? What evidence proves that members strive to live out their faith and show gratitude for

God's mercy and their unique identity as God's possessions to glorify Him and attract others to Christ for salvation?

Closing Prayer

Thank You, Father, for making us Your dwelling place and royal priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices and ourselves to You for Your glory. We desire to fulfill the responsibilities of this dual identity by committing to internalizing and applying the sincere milk of Your Word to our lives so that we mature spiritually and become effective witnesses in the world. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Conclusion

(Preparing for Next Week's Lesson)

Next week, we will begin a new unit about the ministry of the prophet Isaiah. To prepare for the lesson, read Isaiah 6:1-8; 38:1-5 and ask this question: "How might God use your story to set other people free?"

Home Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY, September 1	"God Sends a Messenger"	(Mark 1:1-8)
TUESDAY, September 2	"God Defends the Chosen People"	(Isaiah 7:1-7)
WEDNESDAY, September 3	"God Warns of Coming Disaster"	(Isaiah 20:1-6)
THURSDAY, September 4	"God Fulfils His Promises"	(Matthew 11:1-6)
FRIDAY, September 5	"God Works through Unexpected Vessels"	(Matthew 11:7-15)
SATURDAY, September 6	"God Is Gracious and Merciful"	(Psalm 145:1-12)
SUNDAY, September 7	"God Strengthens Those He Calls"	(Isaiah 6:1-8; 38:1-5)

Notes
