

1 Peter 2

LIVING STONES FOR GOD'S HOUSE

We were in rural Ontario this past week. So many of the homes and churches there are quite old and are built of brick or stone. They are sturdy and beautiful buildings, with solid foundations. We love to look at them as we drive through the countryside. Many of these buildings have been there since the 1700s or 1800s. One can be sure these homes and churches have withstood many storms and have seen many generations of people born and die within their walls. As the saying goes, *"If walls could talk, these walls would have much to say."* In today's section of Scripture Peter compares the Church with a building, a building with "living stones." And we can wonder as we listen, "What should the living stones of our church building be saying?"

Peter actually began setting up for this idea of living stones in chapter 1 when he expressed praise to God, who has in His great mercy *"given us new birth into a living hope"* (1:3). Other writers of the New Testament also talked about this idea. Paul taught in Ephesians 2 that the spiritually dead were raised to a resurrection kind of life in Christ Jesus. And in Colossians, Paul said, *"God made you alive with Christ"* (2:13). This belief was shared by the writer to the Hebrews.

If you have confessed to Christ that you are a sinner in need of a Savior and believe His death on the cross was payment for your sins, you have been freed from the fear of death, and have become a member of God's family (Hebrews 12:7-10). You've also been called to keep on loving each of your brothers and sisters (13:1). This provides the foundation on which you can become holy and grow in holiness.

A Christian's desire for growth, as we will see in verses 1-3 in 1 Peter 2, is to *"grow up in your salvation."* This involves being obedient and avoiding sin. People who follow Christ are *"living stones"* in a temple that God is building, and the foundation of this temple is Jesus (verses 4-8). As God's chosen people, called out of darkness to glorify Jesus, we're to live as aliens in a foreign land so that the residents can see an example of how the people in Heaven live. Then when they see our good deeds, perhaps they will be willing to admit when Jesus returns that the deeds of His followers were indeed good deeds.

One way a believer demonstrates his/her heavenly citizenship is to obey earthly laws, submitting to rulers and doing good as we will learn in verses 13-17. Slaves are to submit even to harsh masters, for Jesus subjected Himself to injustice and we are to follow His example according to verses 18-23. Having been redeemed, saved by Jesus, we turn from

a life of sin and commit ourselves to a life of righteousness, according to verses 24, 25.¹
So with that background and overview, let's now take a closer look at 1 Peter 2.

1 Peter 2:1 NLT:

*1 So **get rid of all evil behavior**. Be done with all deceit, hypocrisy, jealousy, and all unkind speech.*

Believers have been ransomed by the blood of Jesus. Therefore, Peter tells them to get rid of all their evil behavior. Peter then listed five sins of attitude and speech that could cause confrontation between believers. **The first** refers to any and all evil actions and thoughts, then he zeroes in on some specific ones, possibly ones that he was aware his readers were particularly struggling with; second is **deceit**, deliberate dishonesty; then we have **hypocrisy** which means to put on a false front, a big act to make people think you're something that you're really not; **envy** means a jealous resentment; and **slander** means lying behind someone's back, or conversation that tears the other person down. None of these behavioral patterns should have any place in the life of a believer. Believers are expected to live in obedience to the Word and believers are also expected to make a clean break with the past.

1 Peter 2:2-3 NLT:

*2 Like newborn babies, you must crave pure spiritual milk so that you will grow into a full experience of salvation. Cry out for this nourishment,
3 now that you have had a taste of the Lord's kindness.*

Peter wanted his readers to desire the Word of God as much as babies desire milk. After a believer discards the evil behavior Peter described in verse 1, they then need to change their diet and begin consuming wholesome spiritual food that produces growth. They are to crave it so much that they cry out and beg for a fuller knowledge of the Bible. God's Word does not mislead anyone and neither should anyone who claims to be a child of God.

Verse 3 refers to the fact that having had a taste of Christ through salvation, those who follow Christ should desire more of Him. A new Christian needs to feed himself/herself daily from God's Word in order to grow, just as a baby needs to be fed in order to grow physically. This means protecting our minds from anything that could draw us off the path of following Christ and filling our minds with whatever might keep our eyes focused on that path. In this way we can progress toward the goal of full salvation. Remember what we've often said: "What you put into your mind is what you become."

It's most discouraging when Christians have no taste for God's Word and prefer a diet of entertaining preaching and entertaining religious services instead. Or they would rather read books about the Bible, rather than the Bible itself. As we grow, we discover that the

¹ Richards, Larry: The Bible Reader's Companion. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1991, S. 880

Word is milk for babies, as well as filet mignon for the mature.² It's also referred to as bread (Matthew 4:4) and honey (Psalm 119:103). When Christians are growing in the Word, they are peacemakers, not troublemakers, and they promote the unity of the church.³

1 Peter 2:4 NLT:

4 You are coming to Christ, who is the living cornerstone of God's temple. He was rejected by people, but he was chosen by God for great honor.

Peter's readers, having been purified by the grace of God through their faith in Christ, were prepared to practice holiness. No longer babies, they were to grow up together to serve Christ as a chosen "royal priesthood."

1 Peter 2:5 NLT:

5 And you are living stones that God is building into his spiritual temple. What's more, you are his holy priests. Through the mediation of Jesus Christ, you offer spiritual sacrifices that please God.

It's important for Christians to realize that they need to grow together as well as individually; a point that Peter is about to address. By constant communion with Christ, *the Living Stone*, through reading His Word and prayer, Christians will become like Him, living stones. By itself a stone is of little use, but joined with others it becomes part of a building. Peter's thought then switches from the structure (presumably the temple) to those who function in that building. Their responsibility as members of God's spiritual household is two-fold: 1) to worship, *offering spiritual sacrifices* (verse 5) and, 2) to witness, *declaring the praises* (verse 9).

Jesus told Peter in Matthew 16:18: "On this rock I will build My church." Now Peter clearly identifies Christ as the Rock on which His (Christ's) Church is built. Believers are not only the stones that are used to build the Church, but they also serve in it, ministering as a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices. All believers are priests⁴ and need no mediator other than Jesus Christ to approach God directly. Such priestly service requires holiness (1 Peter 1:16, 22). Praise to God and doing good to others are spiritual sacrifices that please God (Hebrews 13:15). However, "living stones" may also offer themselves as "living sacrifices" according to Romans 12:1, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.⁵

The words here and in verse 9 are rich in meaning for God's people from the Old Testament. Their use shows the spiritual continuity between those who respond to God under the old covenant in the Old Testament and Christian believers in the New

² 1 Cor. 3:1-4; Heb. 5:11-14.

³ Wiersbe, Warren W.: The Bible Exposition Commentary. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. 1 Pe 1:22

⁴ cf 1 Peter 2:9; Heb. 4:16; Rev. 1:6.

⁵ Walvoord, John F. ; Zuck, Roy B. ; Dallas Theological Seminary: The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:845

Testament. The emphasis in verses 9 and 10 on belonging to the people of God could have been a great encouragement to those who felt their position as “*temporary residents and foreigners*” in verse 11. Christians individually (1 Corinthians 6:19) and the church corporately (1 Corinthians 3:16) are seen as God’s new temple, *a spiritual temple* because it is inhabited by His Holy Spirit. It’s on the basis of this verse and verse 9 that Christians have stressed that since Jesus has made the once-for-all sacrifice for sin,⁶ the only sacrifices now to be offered are *spiritual* ones.⁷ These are to be offered by all believers who are all considered equal by God. The only ministry (or, office) the New Testament sees as set apart in any way is that of the elder appointed to leadership, teaching and pastoral care. The phrase, *Because of Jesus Christ*, can be taken either to say: how the sacrifices are offered, or why they are acceptable.⁸ Now you may be asking yourself, “*What exactly is a spiritual sacrifice?*” That would include a number of things, such as praying regularly, praising God in every circumstance, submitting to His will in every way, telling others about the Lord, showing love to the hard-to-love people. There are many ways we make “*spiritual sacrifices,*” but they don’t necessarily include giving up chocolate for 40 days during lent.

1 Peter 2:6-8 NLT:

6 As the Scriptures say, “I am placing a cornerstone in Jerusalem, chosen for great honor, and anyone who trusts in him will never be disgraced.”

*7 Yes, you who trust him recognize the honor God has given him. But for those who reject him, **“The stone that the builders rejected has now become the cornerstone.”***

8 And, “He is the stone that makes people stumble, the rock that makes them fall.” They stumble because they do not obey God’s word, and so they meet the fate that was planned for them.

Peter encouraged his readers with a sure scriptural promise of ultimate victory for those who trust Christ.⁹

Two prophecies are drawn together in verses 4 and 6–8: the precious foundation stone of Isaiah 28:16 and the rejected capstone of Psalm 118:22. Jesus applies the latter reference to Himself in Mark 12:10 and Peter quoted Him before the Sanhedrin in Acts 4:11. Jesus is both the foundation cornerstone on which His Church is built, and the capstone up to which it grows¹⁰ (the word can mean both). A cornerstone, of course, is that essential part of a building which provides stability so that the rest of the building can be built. A capstone on the other hand is the final stone in the building; it is that which brings the building to completion. So this is another way that Jesus Christ is “*the first and the last*”

⁶ 1 Peter 2:24; 3:18.

⁷ Rom. 12:1–2 and Heb. 13:15–16.

⁸ Carson, D. A.: *New Bible Commentary : 21st Century Edition*. 4th ed. Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill., USA : Inter-Varsity Press, 1994, S. 1 Pe 2:4.

⁹ Walvoord, John F. ; Zuck, Roy B. ; *Dallas Theological Seminary: The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:845

¹⁰ 1 Cor. 3:11; Eph. 2:19–22.

(Revelation 1:11, 17; 22:13).

These verses present a sharp contrast between those who believe and those who do not. Christ is “*precious*,” to those who believe. But those who have rejected Christ stumble over Him because of their disobedience. This happened to the chief priests and Pharisees that Jesus was referring to when He quoted Psalm 118:22.¹¹ Peter also quotes Isaiah 8:14. Rejection of Jesus Christ is fatal and is connected with disobeying the message of God’s Word. To disobey the message is to reject it; and to obey it is to believe it. 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 and Hell.¹²

There is only one Savior, Jesus Christ, and only one spiritual building, the Church. Jesus Christ is the chief cornerstone of the Church (Ephesians 2:20), holding the building together. Whether we agree with each other or not, all true Christians belong to each other as stones in God’s building. In His first mention of the Church, Jesus compared it to a building: “*I will build My church*” Jesus said in Matthew 16:18. Believers are living stones in His church building. Each time someone trusts Christ, another stone is cemented by grace into the building.

Peter wrote this letter to believers living in five different provinces, yet he said that they all belonged to one “*spiritual temple*.” There is a unity of God’s people that includes all local and individual assemblies and fellowships. We belong to each other because we belong to Christ. This means that we must not permit our differences to destroy the spiritual unity we have in Christ. We ought to be mature enough to disagree on less essential points without allowing disagreements to separate us. This should be possible if we base our beliefs on the total teaching of the Bible. It’s all too easy to distort the message of the Bible if we try to use a single verse here and there to prove what we would like it to mean rather than what it actually means, or if we don’t take the entire teaching of the Bible on that subject into account in our interpretation of a specific verse.

A contractor 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 very solid house.

All too frequently 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).

¹¹ Matt. 21:42; cf# 21:43-46.

¹² Walvoord, John F. ; Zuck, Roy B. ; Dallas Theological Seminary: The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:845.

If all of us would follow God's blueprints given in His Word, we'd be able to work together without discord and build His Church for His glory.¹³

Peter describes Jesus as a *Living Stone* because He was raised from the dead overcoming sin and death. He's the chosen stone of the Father and He's precious. In quoting Isaiah 28:16 and Psalm 118:22, Peter pointed out that Jesus Christ, though chosen by God, was rejected by men. He wasn't 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.¹⁴ Though rejected by men, Jesus Christ was exalted by God. The cause of this Jewish stumbling was their refusal to submit to the message of Christ and the knowledge they had of the Old Testament teaching of the Scripture. Had they believed and obeyed the Word, they would have accepted their Messiah and been saved. People today still stumble over Christ and His cross (1 Corinthians 1:18ff). They keep wanting to find some other way to Heaven other than to accept the fact that Jesus Christ died on the cross for their sins. They are uncomfortable with that and would rather say that entrance to Heaven depends on their own good works or whether or not they "*lived a good life.*" That is stumbling over the cross of Christ. Those who believe in Christ, however, will never regret it.

1 Peter 2:9 NLT:

9 But you are not like that, for you are a chosen people. You are royal priests, a holy nation, God's very own possession. As a result, you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light.

In contrast with the unbelievers, Peter shows how the Christian Church has inherited the privileges promised to the **Old Testament** people of God. Peter emphasizes the biblical principle that privilege involves responsibility. Those who inherit Israel's blessings have Israel's work to do and are to praise the God who has done so much for them by the way they live their lives..

A "holy priesthood" and a "royal priesthood" relates to the heavenly priesthood of Jesus who is both King and Priest (Hebrews 7). In the Old Testament none of the kings of Israel served as a priest; and the one king who tried was judged by God (2 Chronicles 26:16–21). Our God is a God of grace from whom we are able to obtain by faith all that we need in order to live for Him and serve Him. Listen to what the writer of Hebrews wrote in Hebrews 4:14-16 NLT:

14 So then, since we have a great High Priest who has entered heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to what we believe.

15 This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for he faced all

¹³ Wiersbe, Warren W.: The Bible Exposition Commentary. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. 1 Pe 2:4

¹⁴ Matt. 21:42ff; see Ps. 118:22.

of the same testings we do, yet he did not sin.

16 So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most.

And in Hebrews 10:19-25 NLT:

19 And so, dear brothers and sisters, we can boldly enter heaven's Most Holy Place because of the blood of Jesus.

20 By his death, Jesus opened a new and life-giving way through the curtain into the Most Holy Place.

21 And since we have a great High Priest who rules over God's house, 22 let us go right into the presence of God with sincere hearts fully trusting him. For our guilty consciences have been sprinkled with Christ's blood to make us clean, and our bodies have been washed with pure water.

23 Let us hold tightly without wavering to the hope we affirm, for God can be trusted to keep his promise.

24 Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works.

25 And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near.

Each individual believer has the privilege of coming into the presence of God. We don't come to God through any person on earth, but only through the one Mediator, Jesus Christ (1 Timothy 2:1–8). Because He is alive in Heaven interceding for us and within us by the presence of the Holy Spirit, every follower of Jesus can minister as holy priests. This means that we should live as though we were priests in Christ's temple.

Peter emphasizes the privilege of offering “*spiritual sacrifices*.” Christians today don't obviously bring animal sacrifices to God as people did in the Old Testament; but we do have our own sacrifices we can present to God. We should give our bodies as living sacrifices (Romans 12:1–2), as well as praise through the things we say (Hebrews 13:15) and the good things we do for others (Hebrews 13:16). The money and other material things we share with others in God's service is also a spiritual sacrifice (Philippians 4:10–20). Even the *people* we win to Christ are sacrifices for His glory (Romans 15:16). We offer these sacrifices through Jesus Christ, for only then are they acceptable to God. If we do any of this for our own glory, then these things will not be accepted by God.

God wanted His people Israel to become “*a kingdom of priests*” (Exodus 19:6), messengers to tell the whole world about Him. But Israel failed God.

Instead of being a positive influence on the godless nations around them, Israel became like those nations and adopted their practices. Therefore, it was necessary for God to

discipline His people many times for their idolatry, but they still resisted living according to God's plan. It's important that believers, as God's priests, do not adopt the world's standards. We must segregate ourselves because the world needs our influence and witness, but even though we live in the world we must not allow it to change us into its mold or ways of thinking and living.

The fact that each individual believer can go to God personally and offer spiritual sacrifices should not encourage us to isolate ourselves. We are priests together, serving the same High Priest, ministering in the same spiritual temple. While we need to maintain our personal relationship with God, we also need to combine our gifts with fellow believers in serving God.

The emphasis in our pluralistic culture today is that life is all about me. This same attitude is growing in the Church. Too much of the 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. We of course must care for ourselves but we must balance it with caring for others.

1 Peter 2:10 NLT:

*10 "Once you had no identity as a people; now you are God's people.
Once you received no mercy; now you have received God's mercy."*

The description of the Church in verses 9 and 10 is similar to God's description of Israel in Exodus 19:5-6 and Deuteronomy 7:6. This doesn't suggest that God is through with Israel, for He will still fulfill His promises and His covenants and establish the promised kingdom of Israel. But it does mean that the Church today is to God and the world what Israel was meant to be. The Church is an assembly of God's people. God didn't choose Israel because they were a great people, but because He loved them (Deuteronomy 7:7-8). God has chosen us purely because of His love and grace. In John 15:16 Jesus said, "*You did not choose Me, but I chose you.*"

Believers throughout the world combine to form a holy nation. We've been set apart to belong exclusively to God. Our citizenship is in Heaven (Philippians 3:20), so we live according to Heaven's laws and seek to please Heaven's King. Israel began to think that she was a holy nation because they were such special people, and began to break down the walls of separation that made her special and set apart. God commanded them to put a "*difference between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean*" (Leviticus 10:10); but they ignored God's commands and disobeyed Him.

Those of us who have placed our faith in the work of Christ on our behalf are now the people of God. In our unsaved condition, we weren't God's people because we belonged to Satan and the world (Ephesians 2:1-3, 11-19). Once you place your faith and trust in Christ you become a part of God's people. We're a "*people of His own special possession*," or "*God's people*" (depending on your translation) because He purchased us with the blood of His Son (Acts 20:28). All of these privileges carry with them one big responsibility. We are to reveal the wonder of God to a lost world. Because the world is

living in the dark people don't know the perfection of God, but they should see His perfection in the way we live our lives. Each future citizen of Heaven is a living advertisement for the virtues of God and the blessings of the Christian life. Our lives should radiate the wondrous light into which God's grace has called us. After all, we've obtained mercy from God. If it weren't for His mercy, we'd be lost and on the way to eternal judgment in Hell. God reminded Israel many times that He had delivered them from the bondage of Egypt in order that they might glorify and serve Him, but the nation soon forgot and the people drifted back into their sinful ways. Believers are God's chosen people only because of His mercy, and because of this we should conduct our lives in a manner that demonstrates to the world that we're faithful to Him.

We're living in enemy territory and the enemy is constantly watching us, looking for opportunities to move in and take over. As future citizens of Heaven, we should be united. We should present to the world a united front demonstrating what the grace and mercy of God can do. We belong to one family of God and share the same divine nature. We're living stones in one building and priests serving in one temple. We're citizens of the same heavenly kingdom and it's Jesus Christ who is the source and center of this unity. If we center our attention and affection and obedience on Him, we'll be able to walk and work together. If we think primarily of ourselves we'll only cause division.

Unity, by the way does not eliminate differences. Not all children in a family are alike, nor are all the stones in a building identical. In fact, it's variety that gives beauty and attraction to a family or a building. The absence of differences is not *unity*, it's sameness and such uniformity is boring. It's great when the choir sings in unison but it's preferred that they sing in harmony. Christians can differ and still get along. As Paul said in 1 Corinthians 12:4-6:

⁴ There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but the same Spirit is the source of them all. ⁵ There are different kinds of service, but we serve the same Lord. ⁶ God works in different ways, but it is the same God who does the work in all of us.¹⁵

We can do things in different ways, there is no requirement that every congregation be carbon copies in how they do things. The essential thing is that we serve the same Lord Jesus Christ and that we each follow His will. All who cherish their unity of faith and who seek to honor the one God can love each other and walk together (Ephesians 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. After all, one day all of us will be together in Heaven (John 17:24). So it might be a good idea if we learned what it's like to love each other down here.¹⁶

¹⁵ Tyndale House Publishers: Holy Bible : New Living Translation. 2nd ed. Wheaton, Ill. : Tyndale House Publishers, 2004, S. 1 Co 12:4-6

¹⁶ Wiersbe, Warren W.: The Bible Exposition Commentary. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. 1 Pe 2:9

1 Peter 2:11 NLT

11 Dear friends, I warn you as “temporary residents and foreigners” to keep away from worldly desires that wage war against your very souls.

Peter reminds them that they are dearly loved by God. The term “*temporary residents and foreigners*” is the translation of a Greek word meaning “*to have one’s home alongside of pagans,*” thus a “*sojourner.*” The term describes the Christian’s position in this world. He has made his home alongside of the unsaved and settled down among them, a sojourner and one that is a stranger to them because he is different from them. The urging to stay away from fleshly lusts is based on the fact that Christians are living right in the middle of the unsaved, and earthly lusts are still part of their nature that can spring up out of nowhere and tempt them at any time. As a believer you must always be on guard against them. We are told to hold ourselves back from doing the things which we did naturally before we were saved.¹⁷

Do you have a plan as to what to do when Satan attacks you at your most vulnerable point ten minutes after you leave this room? Do you have a bad temper? Perhaps he’ll have someone cross your path that infuriates you. Do you tend to lie to keep yourself from getting into trouble? Then he might have a situation prepared to tempt you to lie. Do you have some other kind of disobedient habit? Rest assured Satan is planning how to pull you into it. Prepare yourself now as to how you’ll keep from following your normal pattern of behavior, and react as an ambassador of Christ. Whatever your weakness you can take it to the bank that Satan will attack you at your weakest point. Be ready for it and you’ll be pleasantly surprised at the self-control you can use through the power of the Holy Spirit.

¹⁷ Wuest, Kenneth S.: Wuest's Word Studies from the Greek New Testament : For the English Reader. Grand Rapids : Eerdmans, 1997, c1984, S. 1 Pe 2:11