

An Important Role

Lesson for February 26, 2023

Unit III: God's Call and Its Responsibilities

Scriptural Background: 1 Peter 2:1-25

Printed Text: 1 Peter 2:1-10

Key verse: *"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."* (1 Peter 2:9)

In the eleventh century, King Henry III of Bavaria grew tired of court life and the pressures of being a monarch. He made application to Prior Richard at a local monastery, asking to be accepted as a contemplative and spend the rest of his life in the monastery. "Your Majesty," said Prior Richard, "do you understand that the pledge here is one of obedience? That will be hard because you have been a king."

"I understand," said Henry. "The rest of my life I will be obedient to you, as Christ leads you."

"Then I will tell you what to do," said Prior Richard. "Go back to your throne and serve faithfully in the place where God has put you." When King Henry died, a statement was written: "The King learned to rule by being obedient." When we tire of our roles and responsibilities, it helps to remember God has planted us in a certain place and told us to be a good accountant or teacher or mother or father. Christ expects us to be faithful where he puts us, and when he returns, we'll rule together with him.

In today's lesson, the Apostle Peter reminds Christians that "God commands those who call Him their Lord and Savior to do what He desires for them – specifically, to live a godly life that reflects His holy character." (*Faith Pathway*, Sunday School Publishing Board)

Key Terms

1. **Chosen** (verse 4) – Selected; one who is the object of choice or of divine favor; an elect person; of those chosen out by God for the rendering of special service to Him.
2. **Hypocrisy** (verse 1) – Deceit; a pretense of having a virtuous character, moral or religious beliefs or principles, etc., that one does not really possess.
3. **Malice** (verse 1) – Extreme enmity of heart, malevolence, a disposition to injure others—without cause, for mere personal gratification, or from a spirit of revenge. The word comes from the Latin word *malitia* from the root word *malus*, literally meaning evil. Wickedness; the desire to do harm or mischief; evil intent; spite.

Lesson Background

The letter has always been identified (as are most general epistles, like James, John, and Jude), with the name of the author, Peter. And with the notation that it was his first inspired letter. There are many outstanding things about Peter. This is the same Peter, who was chosen with James and John to carry out special tasks for the Lord Jesus. This is the same Peter, who walked on the water. He is the same Peter, who saw the transfiguration. He is the same Peter, who told Jesus who He was, when people were guessing who Jesus was. He said, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.

Peter was called to follow Christ in His early ministry (Mark 1:16-17) and was later appointed to apostleship (Matt. 10:2; Mark 3:14-16). Christ renamed him Peter (Greek), or Cephas (Aramaic), both words meaning “stone” or “rock” (John 1:42). The Lord clearly singled out Peter for special lessons throughout the gospels (e.g. Matthew 10; 16:13-21; 17:1-9; 24:1-7; 26:31-33; John 6:6; 21:3-7; 15-17). He was the spokesman for the 12, articulating their thoughts and questions as well as his own. His triumphs and weaknesses are chronicled (in the gospels and Acts chapters 1-12).

Some 30 years after the resurrection of Jesus, Christians are facing greater persecution for their faith. How should they respond? How should we respond to suffering today? The Apostle Peter writes this letter both to comfort believers and to encourage them to stay strong. He urges them to put all their hope in their perfect future with Christ, and to obey and trust Him in the present, even in their suffering. Christ suffered greatly; now the Christ-followers have the opportunity to follow Him even in this, showing His grace and power in their hopefulness, obedience, and faith.

Since the believers addressed were suffering escalating persecution, the purpose of this letter was to teach them how to live victoriously in the midst of that hostility:

- Without losing hope;
- Without becoming bitter;
- While trusting in their Lord; and
- While looking for His second coming.

Peter wished to impress on his readers that by living an obedient, victorious life under duress, a Christian can actually evangelize his hostile world (compare 1:14; 2:1, 12, 15; 3:1-6, 13-17; 4:2; 5:8-9).

First Peter 1 described the glorious reality of our present and future as God’s children, by His grace and through our faith in Jesus. He called us a holy people redeemed by God for new purposes. That means believers must live differently than those in the world around us. In this chapter, Peter narrows down exactly what it means to lead a holy life, including doing battle with our own desire to sin. This also means suffering under human authorities, even unjust ones.

Lesson In Depth

I. Living, Precious Stones (1 Peter 2:1-5)

The first verse is actually a continuation of Chapter 1. We see that Peter is still giving instructions on how to live the Christian life.

Therefore: Peter has just demonstrated the glory and eternal character of God's word. Now **therefore**, in light of what God's word is to us, we should receive the word and receive it with a particular heart.

Laying aside: We must shed the old self that was worldly and take on the garment of righteousness provided for us by Jesus. The Christian's new life can't grow unless sins are renounced. When that purging takes place, then the Word does its work.

Malice: means badness, depravity, malignity, or trouble. The Greek word for evil is used 11 times in the New Testament to indicate that wickedness which comes from within a person (verse 16; Romans 1:29; Ephesians 4:31; Titus 3:3).

Guile: means trick, craft, or deceit. We all know a few hypocrites and pray that we will not be among their number. They pretend to be believers but have not really given up their worldly ways.

All of these things spoken of here, including envies and evil speaking, are ways unbecoming a Christian. Those, who have truly dedicated all of themselves to Christ, will not have these things in their lives.

As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word: 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. Christians should get their nourishment from the Word of God (Bible). It should be the desire of our hearts to fellowship with God in His Word each day. A baby cannot live long without milk, and a Christian cannot grow without studying the Word of God.

A Christian develops a desire for the truth of God's Word by:

1. Remembering his life's source (1:25; Isaiah 55:10-11; John 15:3; Hebrews 4:12)
2. Eliminating sin from his life (verse 1)
3. Admitting his need for God's truth (verse 2), "like newborn babies"; (Matthew 4:4)
4. Pursuing spiritual growth, (verse 2, "by it you may grow")
5. Surveying his blessings (verse 3, "kindness of the Lord").

That you may grow thereby: 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.

If you have tasted that the Lord is gracious: 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.

To whom coming/ Coming to Him as to a living stone: “Coming,” in the Greek here means to come with the idea of remaining. Here it means to remain in Christ’s presence with intimate fellowship (John 15:5-15). The ever-living Stone is our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Jesus is first called the living stone; then we are called living stones. We know that Peter brings this up, because it was the Jews, who rejected Jesus. If we build upon the Rock (Jesus Christ), we shall not be moved by trials and temptations.

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). This spiritual house shows that as much as Israel had a temple, Christians also have one. Yet the Christian’s temple is spiritual, and they themselves are the temple.

Disallowed/rejected ... chosen by God: The messianic credentials of Jesus were examined by the false religious leaders of Israel and contemptuously rejected (verses 6-8; Matthew 12:22-24; John 1:10-11). But Jesus Christ was God’s precious and elect Son, ultimately authenticated through His resurrection from the dead (Psalm 2:10-11; Matthew 3:17; Acts 2:23-24, 32; 4:11-12; 5:30-31; 10:39-41).

Ye also, as lively stones: Christians are so closely identified and united with Christ that the very life that exists in Christ exists in them also (Galatians 2:20; Colossians 3:3-4; 2 Peter 1:4)

Built up a spiritual house: Metaphorically, God is building a spiritual house, putting all believers in place, integrating each one with others, and each one with the life of Christ (Ephesians 2:19; Heb. 3:6).

A holy priesthood: The believer is his own priest before God. He does not need any mediator except his great High Priest, Jesus. “There can no longer be an elite priesthood with claims of special access to God, or special privileges in worship or in fellowship with God.” (Grudem)

Old Testament priests and New Testament believer-priests share a number of characteristics:

1. Priesthood is an elect privilege (Exodus 28:1; John 15:16)
2. Priests are cleansed of sins (Leviticus 8:6-36; Titus 2:14)
3. Priests are clothed for service (5:5; Exodus 28:42; Leviticus 8:7; Psalm 132:9, 16)
4. Priests are anointed for service (Leviticus 8:12, 30; 1 John 2:20, 27)
5. Priests are prepared for service (Leviticus 8:33; 9:4; 23; Galatians 1:16; 1 Timothy 3:6)
6. Priests are ordained to obedience (verse 4; Leviticus. 10:1)

7. Priests are to honor the Word of God (verse 2; Malachi 2:7)
8. Priests are to walk with God (Malachi 2:6; Galatians 5:16, 25)
9. Priests are to impact sinners (Malachi 2:6; Galatians 6:1)
10. Priests are messengers of God (Mal. 2:7; Matt. 28:19-20).

The main privilege of a priest, however, is access to God.

Offer up spiritual sacrifices: 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. 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.

Spiritual sacrifices mean God-honoring works done because of Christ under the direction of the Holy Spirit and the guidance of the Word of God. These would include:

1. Offering the strength of one's body to God (Romans 12:1-2)
2. Praising God (Hebrews 13:15)
3. Doing good (Hebrews 13:16)
4. Sharing one's resources (Hebrews 13:16)
5. Bringing people to Christ (Romans 15:16)
6. Sacrificing one's desires for the good of others (Eph. 5:2)
7. Praying (Revelation 8:3).

There is no more physical sacrifice. Jesus fulfilled all of the sacrifice for us. This is speaking of the spiritual, and not the physical sacrifice. This is not a sacrifice of obligation. It is a sacrifice of love.

Jesus is the High Priest, and all believers in Christ are priests unto God. The sacrifice that we offer up unto God is praise.

II. Light, Precious Stones (1 Peter 2:6-10)

Behold, I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone: 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).

Therefore, to you who believe, He is precious: 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.

The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone: 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**.

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.

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. 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 (quoted from Isaiah 8:14). To every human being, Christ is either the means of salvation if they believe or the means of judgment if they reject the gospel. He is like a stone in the road that causes a traveler to fall. The same Stone that the Christian leans upon for strength is the same stone that those who reject Him stumble over and fall. The verse above seems to indicate, that even some who profess to know Jesus become disobedient and fall on the Stone. To stumble at the Word, means they do not have an understanding of the Word.

They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed: 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)

But you are a chosen generation: 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.

His own special 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**.

Chosen generation: Peter uses Old Testament concepts to emphasize the privileges of New Testament Christians (Deuteronomy 7:6-8). In strong contrast to the disobedient who are appointed by God to wrath (verse 8), Christians are chosen by God to salvation (1:2).

Royal priesthood: Priesthood of Believers. Every believer has the privilege and responsibility of direct access to God. In the Old Testament, the family of Aaron was designated as a priesthood to God. In the New Testament that priesthood becomes the birthright of every Christian. Like their Old Testament counterparts, believer-priests have the privilege of access to God. The concept of a kingly priesthood is drawn from (Exodus 19:6). Israel temporarily forfeited this privilege because of its apostasy and because its wicked leaders executed the Messiah. At the present time, the church is a royal priesthood united with the royal priest, Jesus Christ.

A royal priesthood is not only a priesthood that belongs to and serves the king but is also a priesthood which exercises rule. This will ultimately be fulfilled in Christ's future kingdom (1 Corinthians 6:1-4; Revelation 5:10; 20:6).

With privilege comes a twofold responsibility, sacrifice and intercessory prayer. The sacrifices of the believer are his body (Romans 12:1-2), his praise to God (Hebrews 13:15), his substance (Romans 12:13), and his service (Hebrews 13:6). The Christian ought also to pray on behalf of others (Col. 4:12).

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. 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**.

That you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light: 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.

Who once were not a people but are now the people of God: We once were without these privileges and were not even **a people** before God.

All Gentiles were thought of as dogs by the Jewish people, before Christ came and made them a people. This then, is speaking of Gentiles who have become spiritual Israel. The law was not given to Gentiles. They were not considered God's people. Jesus Christ is available to all mankind. His mercy, not only endures forever, but endures to all mankind.

Now have obtained mercy: God generally has temporal mercy and the compassion of common grace on His creation as a whole (Psalm 145:9; Lamentations 3:22). Paul made reference to this when he said that God is the "Savior of all men". But God has eternal mercy on His elect church by forgiving their sins and eliminating their judgment (Romans 9:15; Titus 3:5).

This is one of the most encouraging Scriptures in all the Bible. God has chosen us to become His sons. This generation of people upon whom the end has come, are chosen of God to be priests unto Him. We are His family. Jesus is High Priest, and we are priests.

All believers in Christ are of the house of Israel. Christians are the spiritual house of Israel. Jews are the physical house of Israel. Christians are this holy nation. We are a peculiar people as far as the world is concerned. We are separated unto God. The marvelous Light is Jesus.

Before we come to Christ, we are walking in darkness. When Jesus takes up habitation inside of us, we are filled with His Light. He is the Light of the world. When we are filled with Jesus, we have all Light dwelling within us.

Lesson Summary

How Christians live on this side of eternity does, in fact, matter. First Peter 1 established who we are as God's people, through faith in Christ. It described why believers are called by God to lead holy lives, different from those in the world around us. God has set us aside for a different purpose. Peter now begins to get specific about what that looks like in our day-to-day reality.

He begins by telling Christians to put away some specific negative attitudes and actions. Instead, we are to grow our appetite for the pure spiritual food available in Jesus. Why does that matter? Because Jesus is the long-prophesied cornerstone, or foundation stone, in the new spiritual house which God is building. Jesus is the chosen and precious one. Those who trust in Him are also living stones in this house. They are a holy priesthood, each one, serving in the house with a responsibility to offer themselves as spiritual sacrifices.

Those who reject Christ are destined to stumble over Him, but those who trust in Him will receive honor with Him. We have been called out of the darkness that all others remain in, and into God's light. So then, it matters all the more that we lead good lives now. Not because we might lose God's mercy—we will not—but because we represent Him to the world around us. Peter insists that we must change our understanding of where "home" is. We must begin to see ourselves as foreigners in the world, preparing to leave to be with our Father.

It's not easy to live that way. In Christ, we have been forgiven for our sin, and we have been freed from sin's power to tempt us to do evil. But we still want to sin. The desire to do wrong wages war against our souls. We must engage in the battle with ourselves now that we have the ability to win it.

One aspect of that battle with ourselves is submission to human authorities. Peter's readers at the time must have felt they had legitimate reasons to rebel against human leadership. When Peter likely wrote these words, the Roman emperor was Nero, an evil man who brutally killed Christians, among others. Many of the early Christians lived as slaves in the Roman world, some wickedly mistreated by harsh masters.

Surely being free in Christ gave Christians the right to rebel against unworthy human authority, didn't it? Peter says no. To be free in Christ means that we have a higher authority, God Himself. God's will for His people is to submit to our human authorities—not out of fear of them or because of loyalty to a man or the state—but to freely give respect and honor to all for Christ's sake.

So Peter is clear: Christians must submit to every human authority, whether the emperor, the governor, or the slave master. This does not mean "obeying" all that human authority tells us (Acts 5:29). It does mean accepting the consequences of obeying God, rather than men. Nor does Peter endorse slavery or the mistreatment of slaves and servants. Rather, he tells Christian slaves how God wants them to endure unjust suffering.

Going further, Peter says that all Christians are called to suffer for doing good. That's what Christ, our example, did for us when He suffered on the cross. He did not retaliate or threaten. He endured the pain and sadness of His suffering and took our sins on Himself, dying the death we deserved. We didn't ask Him to do it, but we would still be lost sheep if He had not. Because He did, we are under the protection and care of our shepherd and Lord.