

The First Letter of Peter
Today's Lesson: 1:22 – 2:10

I. Introduction, 1:1-2

II. The Possessions of the Believer in Christ, 1:3-12

III. The Personal Conduct of Believers, 1:13-2:10

A. Live prudently, 1:13-21

1. As sentinels: "Gird your minds," vv. 13-16

2. As sojourners: "Pass the time in godly fear," vv. 17-21

B. Love deeply, vv. 22-25

Here is Peter's implication ("therefore") of the command to seek after holiness (vv. 13-21).

1. The command, v. 22

The participle, "having purified your soul," seems linked to vv. 15-16 as a particular application of holiness.

a. The fact of cleansing, v. 22a

The command has reference to progressive sanctification (this is something required of us and, therefore, does not suggest our conversion experience since that is a work of God [v. 3]). The purifying endeavor commenced with our rebirth. The tense of the verb is perfect suggested a past event with continuous results. Soul or psyche is the inner spiritual nature as is indicated by "from the heart." Redemption leads to conformity to the object of our affection.

b. The means of cleansing, v. 22b

The "for (NASV)" is better translated "by," not so much as suggesting a consequence as indicating the means. Expressing love is purifying to us in that it turns us from self-preoccupation to others. Growth in holiness will lead to a growth of our love for others; love is true holiness manifested.

It is interesting that Peter uses two different words for love, suggesting that that traditional distinction between "brotherly love ('phileo')" and love for God ("agapao") is not valid. It may be rhetorical or literary. Another explicit example is found in John 21:15-17.

2. The cause, vv. 23-25

"For" tells us that what follows is a statement of reason for what has been immediately stated.

a. Stated, v. 23

The ground of the command, the basis of its fulfillment, is the new birth (“have been born again.” Peter, using a horticultural metaphor, says that the origins of the new life that we have been given (the seed) is rooted in the eternal truthfulness of the words of God. As the following quotation suggests, man’s works are temporal at best, but God’s is eternal. “Living and abiding” imply permanence.

Spiritual rebirth is the possession of the life and character of God. God is love defined; Jesus is love revealed, the indwelling Spirit is love possessed (which is life eternal). The duty of the Christian is to be love-expressed for all to see, especially the other saints of God.

b. Confirmed, vv. 24-25a

This second horticultural metaphor is a quotation from Isa. 40:6-8. “Flesh” is a metaphor for frail humanity. “Word of the Lord” in Hebraic literature means the communication of the prophets, the one temporal and the other true forever.

The point of the quotation is that what humanity perceives as real does not endure, but what God says does! We have been born of God and what He has said will always be true.

c. Concluded, v. 25b

Since God’s promises are eternally true, these have been preached or explained to us, and we have received them. Embracing them, we have the assurance that we will live with God forever.

C. Grow constantly, 2:1-3

The “therefore” or “so” refers to v. 22 (vv. 23-25 being a break in Peter’s argument. Here the author expands on what it means to love one another fervently.

1. The character traits to avoid (“putting aside”), v. 1

Before growth, there must first be pruning. The “milk” or nourishment is the Word of God. The condition of growth is the putting away of all that is evil and nourishing ourselves in the Bible (this idea often appears in the Scriptures: Rom. 12:1; Eph. 4:22, 25; Col 3:8; Heb. 12:1; James 1:21). There are five love-spoiling vices: malice (a general term meaning anything that harms others), deceit (guile or trickery), hypocrisy (insincerity, acting as behind a mask, deception), envy, and slander.

2. The things to long for, v. 2a

Putting away unwholesome practices is a precursor to the addition of good ones. Nursing, or having nursed, mothers can grasp the depth of Peter's metaphor here. We should have a voracious appetite for God's word. The word "babes" is used metaphorically here for believers; it is used literally in Luke 2:16 of Jesus in the manger.

While "milk" sometimes describes elemental practices (Heb. 5:11-13, it is used here positively; we are to be people who ingest the Holy Scriptures

3. The reason to long for it, v. 2b

Being nurtured in the Word of God will result in spiritual maturity (here called "salvation").

4. The basis for it, v. 3

The NASV translates the first word in this verse "if." However, a better grammatical translation would be "since." The indicative mood of the verb ("have tasted") suggests a fact, not a mere possibility. Redemption is not uncertain for Peter's readers; they have tasted of salvation because they have an inheritance reserved for them in heaven (1:3-5). To hear or read the Scriptures is to take nourishment for the soul! "If" introduces a first-class condition, a fact.

D. Be worshiping and praising as the "true Israel," vv. 4-10

In this section, Peter tells us that we are the new people of God, not like the ancient people who had wonderful promises extended to them but took advantage of few. We are a people who have the blessings given to ancient Israel, yet to fuller and deeper measure. We enjoy privileges that were only accorded to priests in Israel; we can all draw near to God. The veil of the tabernacle and temple formed a separation between the people and God because of the sinfulness of them. Only the priest could enter the presence of God. Because Christ has entered for us, being our sacrifice, the veil of separation has been removed. You and I can enter the divine presence because God now dwells within us, not in a building.

1. The nature of duties: figuratively, vv. 4-5

Using the metaphor of building construction material (in this case the Temple) and Christ as a stone (the cornerstone of a new edifice), we are stones (a building constructed on the cornerstone). Collectively these "living stones" make up the dwelling of God among His people (an interesting metaphor since stones do not live). Peter uses analogies from a Hebraic temple ritual to make the

point that these believers are all “priests” and they are to engage in “priestly service.” Peter says that we came to the stone (Christ) and have become stones; these “stones” collectively compose the “true temple,” the truest presence of God.

As the true stone was rejected by the leadership of the nation, though precious to God, so we are God’s new temples, a new dwelling place of God where He is to be worshiped with praise. The tense of the verb “Being built,” being passive voice, indicates that God is doing the building. He is assembling a new temple, “a holy priesthood” to offer sacrifices of praise and obedience to Christ.

2. The basis of duties, vv. 6-8

The builders (ancient Israel) rejected the “stone,” but their verdict was not determinative. The unbelief of non-Christians was anticipated in the OT and should not surprise us. Sacrifices in the OT were not only for the covering of sin, but to express praise and thanksgiving, surely the point here.

a. The authentication, v. 6

The quotation is from Isaiah 28:16 (Jesus quoted it in Matt. 21:42 of the wicked tenant farmers, Peter in his sermon in Acts 4:11). The prophets anticipated a coming one who would be rejected, emerge as a central figure, and be embraced, though rejected by “old Israel.” God had planned this and it was, therefore, no surprise to Him. His purpose was to gather a new people and dwell in a new “temple,” meaning us, as opposed to a nation with a physical building. See John 4:21-24.

b. The consequences, vv. 7-8

1) Embrace by “New Israel,” v. 7a

The benefit of the “cornerstone,” the presence of God in His people is far better than the spiritual experience of old Israel. They had to travel to a temple; we are the new temple; the place God dwells in us by the Holy Spirit.

2) Rejection by “Old Israel,” vv. 7b-8

However, the very “stone” the nation rejected became not only a cornerstone of a new temple, but Ps. 118:22 and Isa. 8:14 reveals that He would become a “stone” of judgment (“a stone of stumbling”). See Matt 10:34-36. Whom they should have embraced, they stumbled over! In tripping over Him, they became disobedient (unto this end they were appointed or destined by God, most likely before creation). The point seems to be that those who rejected Christ have been proven

wrong by God's exaltation of Him as the cornerstone of the new Temple (Christ in us).

3. The new reality expressed, vv. 9-10

A people ("you" is plural) elected by the rejected one have been given an entirely new status; we are the "temple of God's worship." We are to assume the role forfeited by the nation. "But" is a strong adversative. We are not like the ancient people who failed to believe and trust!

a) A new status, v. 9a

It could be that the four descriptions may be simply facets or nuances of the same concept. We are the people of God!

1) "A chosen race"

As the ancient peoples were chosen through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, we are also. We are sons/daughters of Abraham through faith in God's promise. We are the new race of people.

2) "A royal priesthood"

We are a people who can offer spiritual sacrifices to God. Among the ancient people only Levites, the sons of Aaron, stood in the presence of God. That privilege is now ours in Christ. We have access to God and through that serve Him.

3) "A holy nation"

No longer are the nation or people of God defined by ethnicity. Jews and Gentiles compose the new peoples of God. We belong to God in ways others do not.

4) "A people of God's possession"

We are God's special property. The same declaration was said of ancient Israel (Exod. 19:5, Deut. 4:20).

b) A new purpose, v. 9b

"That" suggests a purpose statement to follow. God's purpose in redeeming us is not merely for our benefit, but for witness to others. The phrase "declare or proclaim the excellencies of Him" is not used elsewhere in the NT, but it is used in the Psalms to denote the praise of God. We have been called out of the realm of "darkness into light" to praise God before others. This seems to be an allusion to Isa. 43:14, 21, the context being the redemption of the ancient people from Babylon that His glory might be revealed.

c) The confirmation, v. 10

The quotations are from the prophet Hosea (1:10, 2:23). Just as there was a time when we were not God's people, now we have been granted that privilege (my people).

Thoughts:

1. We are to fear disobedience to God because He is a loving master who in His love corrects the disobedient among His children. We are to fear the consequences of treating His will lightly. Because of His parental affection, He will curb our dangerous tendencies.
2. We must always keep before us the memory of the pit from which Christ has set us free, the enormous cost that was required, and the beauty of the One who did that for us. Do you do that on a regular basis? It will prove a mighty antidote to waywardness. You cannot think of the wonder of redemption and sinning at the same time. One must be out of their mind to consider the other!
3. It is interesting that for many of the great concepts of our salvation there are several tenses involved. An example is found in our passage wherein we are commanded to purify ourselves. We have been made pure in the blood, through the sacrifice, of the lamb-substitute; we are being cleansed (the nuance here) through moral obedience; and we shall be finally, ultimately, and completely cleansed in the day of our final redemption. Knowing the being and end of our redemption should encourage us in between to strive to walk with God with integrity.
4. We are commanded to love the people of God with fervency. How can we do this when we do not know every saint of God? How do I fulfill this when I do not know everyone? The answer seems to be the same for those we know and do not know; that is, our duty of love is fulfilled when we keep God's commandments. Somehow doing what is right is a benefit to those we do not know. The matrix of influence we all have is beyond our comprehension!
5. Do you long for an increasing knowledge of God, knowledge only accessible through the revelation that God has given us in the Bible? Do you take accessing the Bible seriously? Daily? Do you merely see the value of the Bible or are you passionate about learning it? God wants us to be delighted in it and with regularity read its pages.
6. We are the new people of God; we have been called out of darkness into light to be NT priests. That is, people who extol the person and works of God. We are NT priests and unlike OT priests. Unlike OT priest who served in a building, we are the building. Unlike OT priests, we can enter the presence of God whenever we please; there are no restrictions. We are the dwelling place of God! Adult male Jews came to the temple three

times yearly by command; we can come daily. Have you earnestly thought about your privilege? Do you take advantage of it?

7. We have not been saved to simply enjoy it as a private benefit. We have been redeemed to share it. We share it in extolling and praising God, of talking favorably of Him to others. Are you doing that?
8. Peter reminds us once more about the relationship of the OT Scriptures to the NT Scriptures, Israel and the Church. The NT is the fulfillment of the OT and the OT is the foundation of the NT. The Bible can be envisioned as a waffle ice cream cone lying on a table, a pointed end and a wide-opened end. The pointed end is the central promises of the Bible, the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen. 12, 13, 15, 17). Dividing the cone into two parts represents the two testaments. The OT contains the promises made to Israel that were shadows of the ultimate fulfillment in the NT (1:10-12). Israel did not entirely fail to do what God intended because God used them to birth the church (2:8, they were appointed to a limited end; that is, it served us). God always triumphs despite human weakness and dereliction. God will bring about the ultimate fulfillment of the Abrahamic promises in the eternal state. Israel and the church are steppingstones to the final fulfillment of the promise to redeem a people for His sake. While we believe that God will keep His promises to His ancient people. We are a “chosen race,” a “royal priesthood,” a “holy nation,” and a “people possessed of God.” Does this not thrill you! We will join all of God’s people, ancient and new, in the eternal kingdom.