

The Living Stone

1 Peter 2:1-5

I. Laying Aside Sin

“Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking” (1 Peter 2:1).

New Birth = New Life

“Therefore” referring to having been born again. Since the gospel was preached to us and we have been born again with incorruptible seed there is a call. There is a new life that follows the new birth. Since we have been born again we should seek to lead a holy, law-abiding life. Peter, starting with the negative, mentions a few descriptive nouns that may have been problems among the Christians at the time.

Malice, Deceit, Hypocrisy, Envy, Evil Speaking

First he mentions ‘malice’ which means ill-will or desire to injure. The same outward behavior can be righteous or evil depending upon whether or not malice exists. It is a subtle sin and it is easy to deceive others and ourselves when it comes to malice. When someone has wronged you it may be right for you to confront them. When you confront them with a desire to inflict pain or extract revenge it becomes malicious. And you might be the only one who knows what your true intentions were. Anger and indignation can be righteous, malice is never righteous.

Secondly he mentions ‘deceit’. Some versions of the Bible translate this ‘guile’. It is not merely being a liar. Arguably, it is worse. It denotes a cunningness. Guile involves the idea of setting a trap -- the winning of confidence and then taking advantage of that confidence for selfish gain or some other dishonorable motive. When the president waved his finger in the air and said, “I did not have sexual relations with that woman” and was found out, he sought to soften the violation by admitting deception rather than lying. But in many ways deception is worse. It is easy not to trust a liar. A person of guile can win the confidence of people to their destruction.

‘Hypocrisy’ is next. Here is a very misused word. A hypocrite is not a person who claims to be a Christian and then sins. That would be about as accurate as calling Mark McGwire a hypocrite because claiming to be a baseball player he makes an out more often than he hit a home run. If he hits 300 that means he fails seven out of every time he steps up to the plate. ‘Hypocrite’ is a dramatic term. It denotes the idea of play-acting or pretending to be something you’re not. A hypocrite is not a Christian who struggles with sin. If that were the case every Christian in the world would be a hypocrite. A hypocrite is somebody who is pretending to be a Christian. Their concern is with outward appearance. Sinning doesn’t grieve them because it is a violation against the God who saved them, it grieves them because they got caught and their cover is blown. Speaking to the scribes and Pharisees Jesus defines a hypocrite: **“Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah**

prophesy about you, saying: 8 ‘These people draw near to Me with their mouth, And honor Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me’ (Matthew 15:7,8). Hypocrites aren’t weak Christians, they’re fake Christians.

Peter then mentions ‘envy’. Envy is the feeling of displeasure produced by witnessing or hearing of the advantage or prosperity of others. Envy involves the covetousness of our neighbors goods. It’s roots are a displeasure and discontent with God’s providential working in our lives. We simply do not like the hand He has dealt us and curse His providence. The Christian who is envious is devoid of any vision regarding the genuine heavenly blessings bestowed on him in Christ. Envy knows no strata. It is not merely poor people envying rich people. In fact it is usually the somewhat rich envying the very rich or the somewhat talented envying the very talented. The movie *Amadeus* which came out a number of years ago gave a wonderful portrayal of what envy can do to a man. Salieri was a God fearing musician during the time of Mozart. He couldn’t understand why God gave Mozart so much more talent than he -- especially since he desired to glorify God with his music and Mozart was a reprobate. His envy drove him to great evil. Those who have envy must meditate on Psalm 84:11 **“For the LORD God is a sun and shield; The LORD will give grace and glory; No good *thing* will He withhold From those who walk uprightly.”** There is no good thing that God holds back from His children. If there is something you don’t have and can’t seem to obtain, it is likely good that you don’t have it. It might destroy you.

Finally Peter mentions ‘evil speaking’. The idea conveyed here is that of backbiting or improper speaking. The taming of the tongue is very difficult. Some have suggested that all sin is the same. In one respect this is true. All sin is the same in that it separates us from God. But sin is not the same in another respect. There are some sins that are especially heinous to God. We see in Proverbs 6 a list of sins God hates. As we examine these seven sins see how many involve the tongue.

“These six *things* the LORD hates, Yes, seven *are* an abomination to Him:¹⁷ A proud look, A lying tongue, Hands that shed innocent blood,¹⁸ A heart that devises wicked plans, Feet that are swift in running to evil,¹⁹ A false witness *who* speaks lies, And one who sows discord among brethren” (Proverbs 6:16-19).

A lying tongue, a false witness who speaks lies and one who sows discord among brethren are at least three sins which involve the tongue. These are on a pretty dastardly list. Suffice it to say we should be careful with our speech. Peter doesn’t tell us to fight these sins but to lay them aside as a garment. Having mentioned what not to do, Peter now moves onto a positive charge.

II. Desire Pure Milk

“as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby” (1 Peter 2:2).

Desire Pure Milk

Having been born again, as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby. There is nothing here to suggest that Peter was talking to immature Christians. He is simply using an illustration. Newborn babies desire milk. They, without compunction, will wake you up in the middle of the night to get it. This should be the disposition of the Christian toward the word of God.

The Word... A Means of Growth

Everybody wants to grow spiritually. That is a good thing. We develop small groups, establish accountability, try to instill good habits in ourselves and get rid of bad habits. Maybe we try to increase our prayer life and spend more time listening to Christian music and fellowshiping with our Christian friends, etc. These may all be good things (maybe not depending on the Christian music) but here Peter gives us the Biblical method for Christian growth. Peter is telling us we should long for the pure milk of the word that we may grow thereby. The lost need to hear the word of God to be saved. The saved need to hear the word of God to grow.

There are a lot of things passing for Bible studies these days that aren't Bible studies at all. Not that these things are necessarily bad. I myself intend to do a class on the Westminster Confession this Summer which I think will be very valuable to the church. But ultimately it is only valuable in that it helps us understand the scriptures more accurately. The goal is to remove the dross of worldly thinking and read the scriptures in such a way that we appreciate it for what it is. Interesting that Peter uses the element of milk. I can't think of drink that is more gross to have floaties in than milk. We need to seek to grasp the scriptures without the backwash of human sophistry. It is a means of grace. The more we know it, the more we grow. It is no wonder that Paul's prayer for the church is,

“...that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him,¹⁸ the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints,¹⁹ and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power” (Ephesians 1:17-19).

Knowledge of Scriptures is Good

Never, ever allow yourself to be criticized for your knowledge or desire for knowledge of the scriptures. One of the subtle traps in modern evangelicalism is a commitment to experientialism with God over a knowledge of God. And with this commitment comes an unspoken commitment to ignorance. This kind of thinking is inconsistent with what Peter teaches us, what Paul prays for us and is a lie from the pit. Desire the pure milk of the word that you may grow thereby.

Have You Tasted?

“if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious” (1 Peter 2:3).

This may be interpreted, “since you have tasted” or “if indeed you have tasted” that the Lord is gracious. The natural understanding here would be something to the effect that ‘if you have indeed tasted that the Lord is gracious, the natural result would be for you to continue in the meal’. It wouldn’t seem right for us to taste the graciousness of God and then just stop eating. I love tacos. When I ate my first taco I didn’t say to myself, “My this is good!” and then never eat another one. I eat them as often as possible. If you have indeed found the Lord to be gracious, i.e., kind and merciful then it would seem that you would want to get to know Him all the more. This is done through the word. Peter speaks of the manner in which we come to Jesus. Peter writes,

III. The Living Stone

“Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious,” (1 Peter 2:4)

From Israel to the Church

We come to Jesus as a living stone. Much of what we’re about to address would be best understood with some working knowledge of the old testament and the significance of the temple. There is a clear allusion here to the church taking the place of Israel as God’s covenant people. The very language used to describe Israel is now used to describe believers in Christ, Jew and gentile alike. Peter writes of the frame of mind we have in approaching Jesus.

The Rejected Cornerstone

We are to come to Jesus as a living stone (actually the chief cornerstone [vs 7]). Apart from Christ the temple is meaningless and has no direction or purpose. As the cornerstone goes, so goes the building. When Jesus was rejected by Israel -- **He came unto his own, and his own received him not” (John 1:11)** -- it was evidenced the meaninglessness of the temple. The whole point of the temple had been forsaken. The cornerstone of the temple was rejected by the builders (vs 7) which of course resulted in

God rejecting the temple itself, the cornerstone falling upon it and crushing it to powder (Matthew 21:44). Jesus, in Matthew 24:28 compares the temple to a corpse where the eagles would gather and destruction would ensue.

Coming to a Living Stone

This would index the end of the old covenant. But the Son of God, though rejected by men, was chosen by God and precious to God. The faithlessness of men never effects the faithfulness of God, nor should it affect our faithfulness. In fact it was God's plan that the temple and all of its accoutrements, a mere shadow of the person and work of Christ, would end in shambles hence there would be no confusion as to where redemption lies. When we come to church we do not come to a building as much as we come to a person. Peter compares Jesus to a living stone. This juxtaposed to a lifeless, inanimate, spiritually emaciated building and religion. Apart from Christ, the most elaborate religious system, even one designed in detail by God Himself, is a corpse that sustains only death.

IV. Living Stones

“you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 2:5).

Organisms Revealing Christ and His Body

Continuing with the temple theme Peter compares us to living stones. This is one of the many, and perhaps most detailed, organisms used to describe our relationship with Jesus. Others are: He is the vine, we are the branches. He is the head, we are the body. Here, He is the living, chief cornerstone and we are living stones being built into a spiritual house. The primary design of the temple was to typify or foreshadow in a physical fashion what would genuinely, spiritually happen. The physical kingdom of Israel typified the spiritual kingdom of God. The temple typified the church (Christ being the head and High Priest who enters into the holy of holies, His bride being the extension of the temple into all the world.)

Priesthood of All Believers

Jesus Christ started an eternal kingdom. He is the cornerstone of that kingdom and throughout history He, by His Spirit, draws men to Himself to form a spiritual house. The members of that spiritual house are to think of themselves as a priesthood. In the old covenant the priests were an elite group who had special access to God. We are never to think of anybody that way. If you are in Christ, you are part of the priesthood of all believers and no one has greater access to God than you. Have you ever entered a church building that was so ornate that you felt there were sacred places you couldn't walk? You can walk there!

A Different Kind of Sacrifice

The old covenant priests offered up animal sacrifices. As the priesthood of all believers, instead of offering up animal sacrifices (since the ultimate sacrifice in Christ has been made) we are called to offer up spiritual sacrifices -- sacrifices of praise (Hebrews 13:15), offerings (Philippians 4:18) and obedience. The most obvious passage that comes to mind is Romans 12:1,2.

“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, *which is your reasonable service.* ² And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God*” (Romans 12:1,2).

Acceptable Through Jesus

Of course we also realize that our sacrifices are not propitiatory. That is, our sacrifices do not appease the wrath of God. Peter is quick to point out that our spiritual sacrifices are only acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For as the remnant of sin remains upon us until glory, so will our best works always be tainted. It is the purging blood of Christ that removes the tarnish from our works and makes them pleasing in the eyes of the Father.

An Amorphous Building

Peter's presentation of the Christian faith seems to be designed is for us to view ourselves as part of something bigger than ourselves. We're not a living stone coming to a living stone but living stones coming to a living stone. So even though Paul tells us, in reference to sexual sin, that our bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit (so in a sense each stone is a self-contained temple) we should view ourselves as part of an amorphous building that continually takes on the changing dimensions of God's assembled people. This amorphous building, which is immeasurable by human calculations, has been growing since Pentecost.

In Short

In short the passage before us can be understood thus: Since we have been born again and have tasted the graciousness of God, let us quit living sinfully (as if we haven't tasted the graciousness of God) and desire and pursue a proper, unadulterated understanding of God's word which, as a means of grace, will cause spiritual growth in our lives. Let us not approach church as some sort of lifeless building but as the living Savior who is the chief cornerstone. God has included us as living stones in this Holy Temple that we may offer up our own lives as a sacrifice in praise, thanksgiving and obedience to God.

Nebuchadnezzar's Dream

Christ has brought us into something that is glorious and eternal. It was the dream of King Nebuchadnezzar as recorded in Daniel 2. Three kingdoms would follow his kingdom, the fourth being Rome. It was during the Roman empire that the Stone, who is Christ, would come. Daniel interpretation of the king's dream was...

“And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever.”⁴⁵ “Inasmuch as you saw that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold—the great God has made known to the king what will come to pass after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation is sure” (Daniel 2:44-45)... And the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth” (Daniel 2:35).