

FIRST PETER

Lesson 9

Spiritual Pursuits

1 Peter 2:4-10

What are our pursuits in life? Do we pursue happiness, financial security, social acceptance, pleasure, power or authority? What we pursue most in this life will be our god. The things we give ourselves to in this life are the things we love most.

Obviously we must pursue a career to support ourselves and our families. There are legitimate social and pleasurable pursuits, and it is not wrong to pursue happiness. However, there is one pursuit which must not elude us; it is a pursuit which must be sought after relentlessly and given the first place in our lives—the pursuit of God and our individual worship of Him.

We have to give time to our jobs, our families and our pleasures, but all of these are to be pursued with God at the center of our lives. If He is not at the center of our lives, then we will be disoriented in this life and never be truly happy with any secondary, legitimate pursuits. *“But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you” (Matt. 6:33).*

In this message we will look at 1 Peter 2:4-10 to see what our spiritual pursuits ought to be as Christians.

SPIRITUAL TEMPLE (2:4-5a)

“And coming to Him”

The “and” connects this verse to the preceding one which says, *“if (since) you have tasted the kindness (excellence) of the Lord.”* When Peter meditated on the excellencies of the Lord Jesus Christ, he immediately deviated from his basic pattern of thought to share with his readers some of the excellencies of Christ, hoping that these truths might motivate them to a deeper life of holiness and encourage them in their suffering.

The words “and coming to Him” could be translated “and constantly approaching Him (Christ).” Christians can approach Jesus Christ face to face because He is their Mediator and Great High Priest who loves and accepts them because He died for them. Christians can and do have intimate fellowship with Jesus Christ who was raised from the dead.

It was very important that Peter’s readers understand that they could approach Christ in true worship because they may have been facing an identity crisis. Many of them were converted Jews. Now that they were Christians and suffering for their Christian beliefs, they may have had some nagging doubts. Much of what was important to a Jew had been swept away by Christ. They had no physical temple, no physical priesthood, no physical sacrifices, no sense of belonging to Israel, God’s people, and no ultimate reason for their existence. They were pilgrims and strangers to this world and they needed some answers. What is God’s program now? How do we fit into it? How can we worship if there is no physical temple, priesthood or sacrifices?

Peter answers all of these questions for these Asian Christians who were approaching Christ, the Great High Priest, in prayer and faith.

“as to a living stone”

Peter uses a metaphor, symbolizing Christ as a “living stone.” Although this may sound like a strange symbol, in the Old Testament Christ was referred to as a stone.

“Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a tested stone, a costly cornerstone for the foundation, firmly placed” (Isa. 28:16).

In the New Testament, Jesus is called a rock. *“And I also say to you that you are Peter and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it” (Matt. 16:18).*

A rock or stone is a very helpful analogy, speaking of stability, a firm position which is immovable and unshakable. Jesus Christ is the very foundation upon which the church is built. He is called a “living stone” because He was raised from the dead and has within Himself eternal life. Christ is the foundation, the source of all spiritual life.

“rejected by men”

The word “rejected” means “tested and disapproved. The “men” first of all must refer to Israel and particularly to the Jewish leaders who tested Christ and disapproved of Him, refusing to accept Him as the Messiah. The living stone, Christ, was rejected by Israel after having been among them for 33 years. They repudiated their Messiah.

Israel assayed Christ’s worth and placed it at 30 pieces of silver, and Israel is still in rejection as a nation to this very day (Acts 2:22-24; 3:13-15; 4:10-11).

However, rejection of Christ is not just by Israel; men in general reject Him. They slight Him, dislike Him, oppose Him and refuse Him even up to this very hour in history and will continue to do so up until His Second Advent.

“but choice and precious in the sight of God”

By contrast, Christ Jesus is the Chosen One of the Father to be Lord, King, Priest, Savior and Messiah. God the Father chose Him to be Lord of the universe, the Head of the Church, the Savior of His people and the Judge of the world. The very first choice in the Father’s plan was to select His own Son to be the rock-foundation upon which He would build the Church. This Christ is “precious” to the Father in that He is highly honored and greatly valued. There was nothing more valuable in the whole universe upon which to build the Church. God gave the One closest to His own infinite heart, His dear Son, that we might be part of the Church and have a relationship with Him.

“you also, as living stones”

Peter declares that individual Christians are living stones because they are in union with Jesus Christ, the Living Stone, and share the very resurrected, eternal, spiritual life of Christ. Christians come alive because they partake of Christ’s nature. The symbol of “living stones” came right out of Peter’s own experience.

When asked by Christ who he thought Christ was, Peter answered in a firm way that He was the Christ, the Son of God.

“Now when Jesus came in to the district of Caesarea Philippi, He began asking His disciples, saying, ‘Who do people say that the Son of Man is?’ And they said, ‘Some say John the Baptist; some, Elijah; and others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.’ He said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ And Simon Peter answered and said, ‘Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God’” (Matt. 16:13-16).

Then Christ made a strong declaration about Himself being the foundation of the Church.

“And Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it’” (Matt. 16:17-18).

In Matthew 16, the word “Peter” is *Petros* which literally means in the Greek “a loose, unstable chip of rock.” When Christ says “and upon this rock” He uses a different word which is *petra*, meaning “an immovable mass of rock, a ledge.” This “rock” (*petra*) is Christ, the Son of the living God. The Church is built upon Christ, the foundation, and all the devices and strategies of hell shall not overthrow it.

Peter is not the rock upon which the church is founded. It is Christ. Therefore, all claims that Peter is the first pope are unfounded biblically. Peter only considered himself as one of the living stones.

Any person who is willing to say, “Lord Jesus, you are the Christ, the Son of the living God,” becomes a living stone and is placed upon the foundation of Christ.

“are being built up as a spiritual house”

All living stones, Christians are placed on the foundation, Christ, and the sum of them forms a spiritual house. The foundation is Christ and the superstructure is all Christians. This obviously is speaking about a spiritual temple made up of all Christians of all time. Christians do have a temple, but it is not a temple made with human hands and beautiful inanimate materials.

It is a spiritual temple, the true Church, made by the hands of God Himself.

The Jews in the Old Testament prided themselves on their physical temple. It was a most costly and splendid edifice; it was filled with marvelous artwork, beautiful jewels and lavish ornaments and tapestries. The Old Testament temple was the place where God dwelt. However it is only a type or shadow of better things to come. God used the physical temple in the Old Testament to depict the spiritual reality of the Church in the New Testament.

Christians no longer worship around physical things which appeal to the human senses; they now worship in spirit and in truth.

“Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, shall you worship the Father. You worship that which you do not know; we worship that which we know; for salvation is from the Jews. But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers” (John 4:21-23).

Christians have a more glorious temple than did the Old Testament saints because the spiritual temple is made up of spiritual, animate, living stones (Christians) held together by the mortar of the presence of the Holy Spirit. God dwells in this spiritual temple, the Church.

“In whom (Christ) the whole building, being fitted together is growing into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit” (Eph. 2:21-22).

The “spiritual house” is not a reference to the local church or any specific denomination. It is a reference to the mystical body of Christ, the universal Church. Remember, Peter is addressing Christians in five different Roman provinces in Asia Minor (1:1). Therefore, this could not be a reference to the local church.

Notice also that this is a present tense and should be translated “are being continually, constantly built up.” The process will go on until the last living stone is put into the spiritual temple. Each new conversion to Christ adds to this building.

Christians must think biblically. The counterpart of the temple today is not the church building; the counterpart is the body of Christ—the individual Christian and any group of Christians gathered together in the name of Christ. There are no physical, holy sanctuaries today. There are no physical Christian temples. There is no such thing as Christian buildings, or for that matter Christian architecture. The local church is not a building; it is a group of Christians meeting in a building. God does not dwell in a building any longer. He dwells in His Church, a holy temple, and in individual Christians.

“Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body” (1 Cor. 6:19-20).

One time a woman came out of church and said, “Preacher, did you see that young boy chewing gum in the sanctuary this morning? Surely that is no behavior befitting a Christian.” The preacher replied, “Lady, I have news for you: the sanctuary was chewing the gum.”

SPIRITUAL SACRIFICES (2: 5b)

“for a holy priesthood”

Christians also have a spiritual priesthood in that every Christian, without exception, is his own priest before God. In the Old Testament temple, there was a

physical, Levitical priesthood appointed to minister there to offer up physical, bloody sacrifices. A priesthood speaks of access to God. A priest represents man before God.

In the Old Testament, priests were mediators for the people, but now in the new dispensation of the Church, each individual Christian is his own priest before God according to the order of Melchizadec. The believer-priest goes directly to the Father through Christ. The universal Church is a priesthood set apart to God. Every individual is a believer-priest. The Old Testament physical priesthood has been done away with. Now each Christian is his own priest, carrying out a spiritual ministry.

“And He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to Him” (Rev. 1:6).

“And Thou hast made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth” (Rev. 5:10).

For over one thousand years, (from about 500 AD to 1500 AD), the truth of the priesthood of the believer was a lost doctrine to the Church, but it was revived by Martin Luther. We must remember that there is no physical priesthood today and any group of Christians who claim a physical priesthood are unbiblical. Needless to say, the name “priest” should never be conferred on any clergyman.

“to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”

The end or goal of the universal priesthood of all Christians is that they might offer up spiritual sacrifices to God. An analogy is made between Israel and their physical, ceremonial worship and the Church and their spiritual worship. The Old Testament Levitical priests had the ministry or service of offering up bloody, animal sacrifices which was the giving of a life for a life. However, Christians, believer-priests, offer spiritual sacrifices.

What are these spiritual sacrifices? According to the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, these sacrifices are praise, performance and pocketbook.

“Through Him (Christ) then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name. And do not neglect doing good and sharing; for with such sacrifices God is pleased” (Heb. 13:15-16).

We offer up “praise to God” in that we see Him as a benevolent sovereign in control of our lives, and to our God we give thanks. We offer up good works as we are motivated by Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit. We offer up our monies to God because through this we show that God is more important to us than our money. The highest spiritual sacrifice which we Christians offer is our person. *“I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship” (Romans 12:1).*

As spiritual priests, we have the privilege of offering up our lives, not as a dead sacrifice, but as a living sacrifice, in which we die daily to sin and live for God. Notice the phrase *“which is your spiritual service of worship.”* This could be translated, “which is your only logical act of worship.”

What then is worship? Worship is not an emotional sensation or a feeling we get when we see a stained glass window, observe a church steeple or hear a beautiful choir. Worship is always a response to revelation. It is responding in obedience to the truth. We can worship in a meeting of the local church; we can worship while changing dirty diapers; we can worship while taking a shower or changing a flat tire. We can worship any place because we are believer-priests. We can respond to truth as God reveals it to us.

How this truth should excite us! We have a temple; we have a priesthood; we have sacrifices—and when we offer them, it is well-pleasing to God and we are rendering true worship. These sacrifices are to be offered “through Jesus Christ.” Our best efforts for God are still tainted with sin, but we offer our sacrifices to God as they are through the cleansing blood of Christ. We also offer our sacrifices as we are motivated by Christ.

SPIRITUAL CHOICES (2:6-8)

“For this is contained in Scripture: ‘BEHOLD I LAY IN ZION A CHOICE STONE, A PRECIOUS CORNER STONE AND HE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM SHALL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED.’”

Peter quotes Isaiah 28:16 to show that Christ was prophesied about in the Old Testament. Another symbol of Christ is used in the chief corner stone. The corner stone was the key block at every corner of a building which determined all the angles and lines of both the foundation and the superstructure. The corner stone would bind together two walls so as to lock the foundational structure together. The two walls, while not mentioned, would speak of Christ binding the Old Testament and the New Testament together. The walls probably also speak of Christ as binding both Jews and Gentiles together to form the Church.

Again we see that Christ was a “chosen out one,” the Father’s first elect person, and He was precious in that He was highly esteemed and valued in the sight of God.

Peter then makes a very positive statement: “*He who believes in Him (Christ) shall not be disappointed (put to shame)*” because the believer’s hope is sure and certain, being founded upon a rock, even Christ Jesus the Lord.

“This precious value, then, is for you who believe”

Those who believe in Christ see Him as of inestimable value. Only one type of person sees Jesus Christ as precious: those who believe. When was the last time you said, “Precious Jesus, I love you because you first loved me.”

“but for those who disbelieve, ‘THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED, THIS BECAME THE VERY CORNER STONE.’”

The “builders” are the nation of Israel, especially the religious leaders, who built their own religion on ritual and tradition rather than the Holy Scriptures. They tested the Living Stone, Jesus Christ, and rejected Him (Psa. 118:22), but the rejected Living Stone was made the corner stone (in spite of their unbelief) on which the whole Church was built.

“and ‘A STONE OF STUMBLING AND A ROCK OF OFFENSE;’ for they stumble because they are disobedient to the word.”

Jesus Christ is precious only to those people who love Him and believe in Him. To those who do not believe in Him, He is not a foundation stone. He is a stone which causes stumbling and offense.

Two concepts are used here. “A stone of stumbling” refers to a loose rock on the path which one trips over or kicks at; that is, unbelievers stumble over Christ and constantly kick against Him in unbelief. The “rock of offense” refers to a ledge which stands across one’s way, an obstacle one cannot get through and this in turn brings a scandal. This is exactly what happens to an unbeliever when he is confronted with Christ. Everywhere he turns he finds the Lord. He cannot get away from Him. Just when he thinks he is free, there Christ is again. He fights Christ to the point where it is scandalous. Christ will not leave him alone; He hounds him; He runs him down, blocking his path. Christ is unavoidable, he cannot get away from Him.

Unbelievers stumble because they are disobedient to the Word; that is, they are offended with Christ Himself and with His doctrine.

I have a seminary friend who went to be a pastor at Peninsula Bible Church in Palo Alto, California. His name is Dave Roper. Dave had a tremendous ministry at Stanford University. He tells the story of how he was sitting in front of Stanford Memorial Church waiting for a person with whom he had an appointment. He noticed a young man sitting on a bench near him. The young man seemed to have nothing to do, so he struck up a conversation with him. The young man was personable and warm and outgoing. Dave made small talk and finally asked him if he was interested in spiritual things. He said, “Yes, very much.” Dave said, “Have you ever considered Jesus Christ?” The young man jumped off the bench, whirled around, turned red in the face, and became absolutely irate. He started to storm off, and Dave said, “Excuse me, but that’s a rather extraordinary response. Can you tell me what it is that’s so offensive?” He turned back and said, “My parents are Presbyterian missionaries in Taiwan. I was raised in a mission compound in China. All of my life I’ve been running away from Jesus Christ, and would you believe it, everywhere I go some Christian sits down and starts talking to me. I just can’t believe it!” And he stormed off. What was this all about? Well, the Lord was tracking him down. He would not leave him alone. The Lord Jesus had become a stone of stumbling to this young man.

“and to this doom they were appointed.”

This is a very difficult phrase and it can legitimately be interpreted in two ways. Before the interpretations are given, it should be noted that the word “doom” is not in the original Greek and it merely says, “and to this (in which) they were appointed.” This may mean these rejectors were appointed by God in His plan to be disobedient, which would support a double-predestination position. The “to this” is closest in position to the word “disobedience.”

Furthermore, there is a strong contrast with verse nine which declares the sovereign election of some to salvation: *“but you are a chosen race. . .”*

The disobedient rejecter of Christ was appointed by God to fulfill His inscrutable purposes. This verse, then, seems to tell us that nothing happens by chance. Unbelievers in Christ are not forced or compelled to disobedient unbelief. They voluntarily do this by an act of their own wills. But even man's rejection does not take God by surprise because He has a plan, and it certainly will be carried out. There are other verses in scripture which seem to support this view (Rom. 9:22- 23; 2 Thess. 2:10-12).

The "to this" may refer back to the "stumbling." Their stumbling was appointed by God because of rejection, disobedience and unbelief. They were appointed to the penalty of unbelief. The penalty for their stumbling was eternal judgment which is appointed for all who reject Jesus Christ. If this view is taken, it would eliminate any concept of double-predestination.

CONCLUSION

If you are a Christian, remember with me that it was God's sovereign call to salvation that brought us to Christ and placed us in the Church, God's family. God in His grace showed mercy on every Christian and through the new birth brought each Christian into a spiritual relationship with Himself in which we can be fully accepted and loved.

Once we are saved God gives us the Church, a vital community, to have us share all that we have in Christ. It is within the body of Christ, the Church, that the Christian community is to have a sense of being loved, accepted and needed. God has called each Christian into this community where other Christians can accept us, love us and share their lives with us. That is the real meaning of belonging to God's people.

If you are a non-Christian, I have some solemn words for you. Do not reject Christ! Do not be disobedient to the Word that Christ forgives sins and gives eternal life. Do not stumble at Christ's sovereign claims over your life. If you refuse to accept Christ as your Savior and to bow down to Him as your Lord, then you shall face eternal judgment. You will then merely prove what the Bible says: "To this doom you were appointed."

How then can you know you are chosen to salvation? How can you realize that God has called you out of darkness into light? How can you get among God's elect? How can you be an object of God's mercy? Believe that Christ died for your sins and rose from the dead to be your Lord, King and Master—for "he who believes in Him shall not be disappointed."