

1st PETER BIBLE STUDY

1 Peter 2:4-10

Lesson #9

Introduction

A Spiritual House for a Holy Priesthood

4 And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God, 5 you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. 6 For this is contained in Scripture:

"Behold, I lay in Zion a choice stone, a precious corner stone, And he who believes in Him will not be disappointed." 7 This precious value, then, is for you who believe; but for those who disbelieve, "The stone which the builders rejected, This became the very corner stone," 8 and, "A stone of stumbling and a rock of offense"; for they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this doom they were also appointed.

9 But you are a chosen race, A royal priesthood, A holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; 10 for you once were not a people, but now you are the people OF GOD; you [once] had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

1 Peter 2:4-10 (NASB)

Verse 4:

4 And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God,

In this verse Peter begins to build an analogy. He begins this analogy with the metaphor of a living stone, which stone represents Christ Jesus the Lord. It seems quite likely that he gets this from the Old Testament Scripture where the prophet Isaiah uses this same language concerning the coming Messiah. (Isa 28:16) Peter says that this stone was rejected by men. To follow the analogy, and fit the metaphor, he's saying, just as Master builders examine and accept or reject building stones which they use in their buildings, in like manner, mankind, and the Jews in particular, examined the Lord Jesus, and decided He was not suitable building material. They watched His miracles, and they listened to His teachings, and in the end they rejected Him.

In the very beginning of His ministry people were curious and multitudes came out to see Him and hear Him. Many were amazed at all His miracles and the words that He was speaking. The news of Him spread throughout all Israel and people came from far and wide to see and hear Him. But in spite of all the miracles that He did, the words that He spoke eventually stirred up their anger. He told them that they were slaves of sin, that they were poor and oppressed by their bondage to iniquity. This was not what they wanted to hear. They wanted him to affirm their righteousness as chosen descendants of Abraham. But instead He rebuked them for their sins, and told them to repent or they would surely perish.

In the end, this message didn't seem to be very popular, notwithstanding the fact that it's absolutely true. True or not true, people don't want to hear that they are sinners in need of repentance. They want to be told that they're okay. If Jesus had simply healed the sick, cast out demons, restored the sight of the blind, healed the limbs of the lame, and told the people that He loved them and they would all be okay, then He would never have been crucified; in fact He would have been the most popular preacher of all time.

So then, why didn't Jesus do that? Why did He have to add all that stuff about sin and repentance that made people angry and got Him crucified? I mean He could have had the most gigantic ministry in all history. Imagine a church in today's time that could actually really do miracles, not the bogus hocus-pocus we see today, but real miracles. Restoring the sight of the blind, healing terminal cancer, literally raising people up from the dead. A person could build a pretty big church if he could do this kind of stuff couldn't he? Even the phony hocus-pocus ones today built pretty big churches like this.

But this wasn't anything like the Lord Jesus. Oh yes He did miraculous works, so as to substantiate the truth of the words that He spoke, so that people could know for certain that He was for real and His words were true. But He showed absolutely no interest in being popular among men, or about building a huge ministry for Himself, but rather His declaration was that He came to do the will of his Father. Which will was to save lost sinners from their sins. So He told the people what they needed to hear for the salvation of their souls. He proclaimed the good news that God the Father had provided Him as a propitiation for their sins, if they would confess their guilt, repent, and believe on Him. And this is the offer, the message of good news, that was rejected by men.

But Peter goes on to say that this living stone that was rejected by men, was nonetheless *choice and precious in the sight of God*. And this was proven beyond a doubt by His resurrection from death and ascension into the heavens. Though He was rejected by men, He is exalted by God, and has a name that is above every other name. Though He was rejected by the men of that time, and sadly by the vast majority of mankind in our own time, nevertheless every knee will eventually bow to Him, and every tongue will confess that He is *the King of king's*, and *the Lord of lords*. Hallelujah for that day, come quickly Lord Jesus. Amen.

Verse 5:

5 you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

Now, Peter continues to build his analogy by likening us to stones, living stones, which are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood. As men build a tangible house out of stones, and that house is intended to be occupied for some kind of purpose, likewise, we who believe are like stones which are alive, and are being built up into a specific type of edifice, called a spiritual house. Why a spiritual house? Because the intended occupants of that house are a holy priesthood. Every living stone forms an integral part of this spiritual house, and collectively this spiritual house itself constitutes the holy priesthood. The stones make up the house, and the house constitutes the priesthood. Using this metaphor of stones to simulate Christ and His followers makes for a very illuminating analogy.

We all recognize the difficulty of speaking and communicating in terms of spiritual things. We almost have to use metaphors and analogies because the things of the spirit are completely beyond our fleshly perception. For the present they exist as abstracts in our mind and our spirit and our soul. It's true that we are very much aware of these things, because their affects upon us are observable, but the actual forces themselves are not. Jesus used the wind as an analogy when he spoke to Nicodemus, because Nicodemus couldn't see the things of the spirit.

As living stones we cannot actually see this spiritual house, and this holy priesthood into which we are being fashioned, so we must rely on those tangible effects that are evident. Because it is those visible affects that comprise the whole point of the house and priesthood. If a spiritual house is invisible to the eyes, and the priesthood that it constitutes is spiritual in composition, then the only point of such a house and a priesthood must be for the visible affects that it produces. Otherwise what is the point? And this is what the remainder of this verse tells us. It says that the whole purpose of this spiritual house, and holy priesthood, is *to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ*.

Now here we have an extraordinary statement if we look at it closely and ponder the implications. Peter says that this spiritual house, made of living stones, which constitutes a holy priesthood, has a purpose. And what is that purpose? To offer up spiritual sacrifices **acceptable** to God. I hope I don't shock you with this statement, but by and large the vast amount of spiritual sacrifices offered to God are not acceptable by Him. You might ask how dare I say such a thing? The answer is I don't, the apostle Peter does, right here in the holy Scriptures. And he goes on to tell us what makes sacrifices to God acceptable or not acceptable. And what is that which makes them acceptable, it is that they are offered through Jesus Christ.

And that doesn't just mean it has his name attached to them. It means that those who offer these sacrifices have not rejected Him and His absolute Lordship over them. They have acknowledged their guilt, they have repented of their sins, and placed their entire faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Any sacrifice offered to God that is not through Jesus Christ, and by that I mean in the manner just described, that sacrifice is like a blemished offering in the Old Testament, it is simply not acceptable in the eyes of God. In times of old God selected a tribe from among the Jews to be His Priesthood. It was the job of this priesthood to offer up sacrifices on the altar of the Lord. Part of their job was to examine the animals brought to them to make certain that they were absolutely flawless. And if they contained a flaw they were deemed unsuitable for sacrifice. The intentions or enthusiasm of the offerers had no bearing on the quality of the sacrifice, it was either unblemished or it was unacceptable.

And such is the situation today. Any offerings that we might want to offer to God may only come by way of this holy priesthood selected by God, because it is only they who have been sanctified, and qualified for worship, through their acceptance of the Lord Jesus Christ and His atoning blood. A well-meaning Muslim, or Hindu, or Buddhist, or any other religious group may well wish to offer something to their god, but the apostle Peter says that unless they are coming through a genuine faith in Christ Jesus, then they are not acceptable to the true God. But someone might say - but that's so very narrow and exclusive, surely God accepts all well-meaning worship. Well my dear friend, according to the apostle Peter, this simply is not so. According to the apostle Peter, God is indeed extremely narrow, and utterly exclusive, and with absolute sovereignty He dictates the acceptable terms of worship, not us. From God's point of view, it's take it or leave it, He simply doesn't negotiate the terms of acceptable worship, and He makes no apologies for it.

Okay, so now that we understand what Peter is telling us concerning our being a holy priesthood, constituted for the particular purpose of offering up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ, what exactly are these spiritual sacrifices that we are intended to offer to God as worship? What is an acceptable spiritual sacrifice to God? One very good place that comes to mind is from the apostle Paul. In his epistle to the Romans in Chapter 12 he says:

1 Therefore I urge you, 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. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

Romans 12:1-2 (NASB)

By using this reference verse I feel like I've opened up an entire series all of its own, and we could do a considerable series on this reference verse alone, but, so that we stay on topic, let's limit our discussion to just a few observations. This verse tells us in very plain terms what the holy scriptures consider to be acceptable spiritual service and worship. It is the presentation of our entire bodies, meaning our entire beings, over to transformation from carnal beings into spiritual beings, through a process of renewing our minds. It involves severing our connection with the old ways of the world and being renewed in our entire thinking and behavior into conformity with Christ. This is our spiritual service of worship, says Paul.

But he doesn't stop here, he goes on to use a little term "so that." By this term he intends to tell us the whole purpose of God for this transforming of our minds into Christlikeness. And what is that purpose, it is "so that" we may prove, that is, visibly demonstrate by our behaviors, what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. It is the will of God that we visibly demonstrate, by our attitudes and behaviors, all of those things that He considers good and acceptable and perfect, and abstain from those former sinful practices. By this we offer visible acceptable worship to God, because it is only through the atoning blood of Christ, and the indwelling Holy Spirit, that humanity may carry out this kind of worship. As His holy priesthood, we are to demonstrate, "prove", His attributes to the world, and exalt His glory through our visible Christlikeness. This, says Paul, is our acceptable spiritual service of worship.

Certainly we do works of charity, we help one another and our community in numerous ways and means, and we assemble regularly for corporate worship. We sing beautiful songs, we play stirring music, and we participate in whatever activities for which we are gifted. And certainly all of these are part of those things which are good and acceptable and perfect in the eyes of God, but it is imperative that we not omit or forget, that all acceptable spiritual worship begins with a priesthood that has been severed from sin, and transformed in their minds into conformity with, and total subjection to, the Lord Jesus Christ. One must truly be among this holy priesthood of believers to be qualified to offer acceptable worship to God, through Jesus Christ. Now, moving on to verses 6-8:

Verses 6-8:

6 For this is contained in Scripture:

"Behold, I lay in Zion a choice stone, a precious corner stone, And he who believes in Him will not be disappointed." 7 This precious value, then, is for you who believe; but for those who disbelieve, "The stone which the builders rejected, This became the very corner stone," 8 and, "A stone of stumbling and a rock of offense"; for they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this doom they were also appointed.

Peter continues with his analogy, using stones as a metaphor, by referencing Isaiah 28:16 and quoting from that passage. This passage says that a precious stone, clearly meaning Jesus, was laid by God for the building of the holy temple. This would be the very corner stone around which that temple would be constructed, and whomever believes in Him will not be disappointed. This prophecy was fulfilled by the Lord Jesus Christ at His earthly incarnation and ultimate appearance among the chosen people of God.

As the passage goes on to say, there would be those who believed in Him, and would not be disappointed, and there would be those who rejected Him and would be doomed to destruction. In the overall plan of God, He exercises His sovereignty over all creatures by eternal decree whereby some He fashioned for glory and some He fitted for destruction. (Rom 9:14-24)

Concerning the group that would not be disappointed, this passage says it is those who believe in Him, this precious cornerstone who will not be disappointed. In other words, those who believe that Jesus Christ is indeed the Son of God, who came into the world to take away the sins of those who repent and believe in Him, these will not be disappointed.

But the other group are those who stumble over the stone. They stumble because they find this stone offensive. As we discussed earlier, this stone, which represents Christ Jesus, was an offense because He told the people that they were sinful, that they were slaves to iniquity, that they must confess and repent of their evil ways. This was outrageous to them, because they thought of themselves as righteous, as the cream of the crop, as God's chosen elect, and to them the rest of the world was as dogs. When the Lord Jesus told them that they were worse than the dogs, they were so angry they wanted to kill them. Even as He was performing miraculous works before their eyes which all of them confessed could only be done by the power of God.

The word that Jesus had for the world was repent and believe, but the heart of man is evil continually, and the desires of his heart are for all of those things which the word of God forbids. Man is disobedient to the word of God because his heart is contrary to God. The Father sent this precious stone, Jesus his Son, into the world not to be a condemning agent, but to be a light of salvation to humanity, to all who would receive Him. The apostle John records:
17 "For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. 18 "He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. 19 "This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. 20 "For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. 21 "But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God."
John 3:17-21 (NASB)

You see from this verse we understand that the Lord Jesus, the precious cornerstone, did not come to a neutral humanity. He did not come to men sitting on top of a fence waiting to make a decision as to which side they would take. These verses from John tells us that He came to an already condemned humanity, whose hearts had already chosen evil and were destined to destruction. Therefore Jesus didn't need to come into the world as a judging agent, that had already been done by God, who pronounced all mankind as evil. (Rom 3:10-18, 23) Therefore this precious cornerstone was sent into the world as a redeeming agent, a means of atonement and escape from judgment. And those who had been chosen by the foreknowledge of God would believe in Him and not be disappointed. (1Pet 1:1-2)

The stumbling over, and the taking of offense at this precious cornerstone is because the heart of man is, by its very nature, contemptuous toward the word of God. Men by nature love the darkness, meaning ignorance and disobedience to God, rather than the light, meaning knowledge of, and obedience to, the Word of God. And such is the nature of all unregenerate mankind. But the good news is, now we come to verses nine and ten which says:

Verses 9-10:

9 But you are a chosen race, A royal priesthood, A holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; 10 for you once were not a people, but now you are the people OF GOD; you [once] had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Peter has been speaking of the builders that rejected the cornerstone, the ones who stumbled and took offense at this precious rock. Which metaphorically speaking is Christ Jesus. The ones who were disobedient to the word and were appointed to this doom. Now, in verse nine, Peter changes the emphasis with the words "but you." He says "but you are a chosen race." This signifies a marked distinction. Note the word "chosen," this word means that there was a choice. A choice, by its very nature, signifies at least two options. By selecting only one of the two or more options, there is intrinsic to a choice both an acceptance, and a rejection. This is what a choice is, it is accepting one, and rejecting the others, it's impossible to be otherwise.

This verse goes on to say that we are "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession." Peter is saying plainly that it is God who has made a choice, and He has selected a certain group to be, to Him, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own personal possession. This verse is clearly speaking of a choice made by God, not by men. When God selected the tribe of Levi to serve as His priests it was His choice alone, and this serves as an example to us today of God's sovereignty in the disposition of His assets. He does as He chooses with that which belongs to Him, and make no mistake about it, human beings belong to Him. He made mankind just as much as He made rocks, and rivers, and trees, and rabbits. And He is perfectly sovereign, and just to dispose of them as suits His desires and preferences.

Continuing on with this verse, after we are told that God has made a particular choice, we again have that little term that we spoke of before, we have that term "so that." What follows is an explanation of the reason that the foregoing choice was made, it is a description of the intended purpose of that object that was chosen. So what does the verse declare as the reason, "so that" we may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light. There is no mystery here, God has made a choice, He has chosen a particular people to serve as a priesthood to Him by virtue of proclaiming His own excellencies. The Greek word which we render "excellencies" is one that refers to morals and virtues, so in English, to fully capture the context, we could say, to proclaim his own moral and virtuous excellencies.

The proclamation of the moral and virtuous excellencies of God is the stated purpose of His choosing out a specific people to be a royal priesthood on His behalf. For an example, the Levitical priesthood of the Old Testament was not charged with taking the 10 Commandments to the surrounding tribes and teaching them the ways of God. The job of the priesthood was to teach God's own chosen people what is the will of God, and to proclaim to them all of His excellence of moral virtues. However, to anyone of the surrounding tribes who came to the priests and showed an interest in knowing the things of God, the priests were told not to turn them away, but to freely make all of these treasures available to them as well.

The nation of Israel was chosen by God, and charged by Him to live their lives in moral excellence as an example to the surrounding tribes of the virtues of the true and living God, as opposed to their decadent idols. Irrespective of how successful they were, this was the appointed purpose for which God singled them out. And this is the appointed purpose for which God has singled out, in this age, a particular people, taken from among both the Jews and all the Gentile nations, a chosen race, a royal priesthood, to proclaim to the world, by their own virtuous behaviors, the excellencies of the true and living God, who has called them out of darkness into His marvelous light. We are called to be evangelists, but our calling goes far, far beyond just that, we are called to be a living sacrifice, a shining lamp set on a tall lampstand for

everyone to see, demonstrating the light of the moral and virtuous excellencies of Him who called us out of our previous darkness.

In my younger years I myself once made comments to the effect that the only purpose for which God left us here after we were saved was to evangelize. When I said that I believed it, but I now must repent of my shortsightedness. When God called the Jews out of Egypt, and gave them His Commandments, and charged them to live accordingly, as an example among the heathen tribes, it made no difference whatsoever how big the nation of Israel came to be, if they failed to live in accordance with His Commandments. For God, it had nothing to do with how big they were, in fact He said they were the smallest of peoples; for God, it was how **holy** they were, not how **many** they were. When He finally judged them, and allowed them to be carried away into captivity by the Assyrians, and the Babylonians, it was not for their failure to grow in size, they had grown in size, but it was for their utter failure to live holy virtuous lives in accordance to His Commandments, this was their failure.

And again, these things serve as an example to us today, that we would learn from them. For us, this New Testament chosen race, this New Testament royal priesthood, this New Testament holy nation chosen by God; it is our stated purpose to be those who proclaim, by our own virtuous lives, the excellencies of the One who called us out of our old darkness, and into His marvelous light. It has nothing whatsoever to do with how many of us there are, it is entirely about the manner in which we live. Just exactly like the Jews, if we fail as a priesthood, it will not be because we were too few in number, but because we did not live up to the calling of God to proclaim His moral excellencies through our obedience to His Commandments. A gigantic body of Christianity, just like a gigantic body of Israel, is not a suitable substitute for holiness of life.

No matter how successful or unsuccessful we might feel our evangelistic efforts are, our stated mission statement, as God's chosen priesthood, is to be a holy nation which is a living demonstration of the moral and virtuous excellencies of the true and living God, whom we proclaim and serve and worship. If we are not succeeding in this, then it makes absolutely no difference whatsoever how many people answer our altar calls, how many people fill our churches on Sundays, and how many people call themselves Christians. We can appear to be successful evangelists by filling our churches, and at the very same time be an utter failure as a royal priesthood, just as Israel did, if we fail to understand that our calling by God is to be a living demonstration of the moral and virtuous excellencies of God. And, my dear and precious friends, it is my fear that this is, by in large, exactly what we are doing.

The vast majority of churches, even those calling themselves evangelical, are preaching evangelism, prosperity, personal fulfillment, and present day worldly success, as a means to increase and build up this body that calls itself Christianity. But irrespective of the apparent success of these methods, if our churches, and our pastors, are not preaching holiness of life, and faithful obedience to the Word of God, as indispensable, non-negotiable characteristics of a holy nation and a royal priesthood, then we will be no more successful in our priesthood than Israel was with theirs. And our end will be as theirs was. Churches that fail to preach obedience to God's word, and a holy and virtuous lifestyle of its members, are utterly worthless in regards to fulfilling this calling of God to proclaim His moral and virtuous excellencies. They are just so much false hopes, hocus-pocus, and hot air, regardless of their size. These may be some of the most important verses we ever study, if we understand them and take them to heart.

Now moving on to verse 10, which says "for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you [once] had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Peter took these words from the prophet Hosea who was speaking concerning the Jews being called by God to be His chosen people but apostatizing so severely that He ended up judging them and dispersing them among the pagan nations. Peter applies them now to this expanded New Testament nation comprised of both Jews and Gentiles. But the meaning is pretty much the same. This diverse group of believers, selected from among every tribe and tongue and kindred and nation, had no specific identity. But, by His own choice, God has called them to be a people for His own possession, the people of God this verse calls them.

It goes on to say that they had once not received mercy. Just as the pagan nations in the time of Israel were not selected by God to receive His Commandments, and know His mercy, so this diverse group from among all the Gentile nations had not previously been called and chosen by God to be the recipients of His mercy, but rather of His wrath, but now, this same group who had not been chosen previously to know the mercy of God, have now received that mercy, as God had declared they would to Abraham from the beginning.

In Conclusion:

Peter tells the church that once they were not God's people, and had not received His mercy, but now, through the atoning blood of Jesus Christ, that which was unclean has now been cleansed, and that which was a nameless mass of lost humanity, has been made the very people of God, and received of His infinite mercy. And, according to our verses, God's reason for doing this is "so that" this chosen people would become a nation of priests, whose lives would be a living demonstration to all mankind of the moral and virtuous excellencies of God, as they are displayed in the daily lives of His chosen people. This is the church's calling from God, this is the full scope of our great commission. To Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

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