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Sermon Brief
Text: 1 Peter 2:1-10
Title: The Privilege of Serving God
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Seeking to faithfully proclaim the whole council of God in scripture!



INTRODUCTION

As the people of God we have been richly blessed. God's grace has been showered down upon us in abundant measure. Consequently we stand as a privileged people. And the greatest of our privileges is to serve God. Although at times it may seem a burden, the reality is that serving God is always a great privilege. And we need to realize this, so that our service to Him becomes what He desires and expects from us.

The apostle Peter in the early 60s of the first Christian century wrote to largely Gentile Christians living along the southern coastal area of the Black Sea, now the northern region of modern Turkey (cf. 1:1-2). Although some Jewish people were a part of the congregations addressed in his first letter, most were non-Jewish. At the beginning of his letter he describes them as "the exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who have been chosen and destined by God the Father and sanctified by the Spirit to be obedient to Jesus Christ and to be sprinkled with his blood."¹ The believing communities were made up of people that the surrounding world considered unworthy and useless. But Peter defines them not as the world did but from God's perspective. They were divinely chosen 'exiles' who lived in five different Roman provinces and God had picked them out of all the population and destined them to live lives dedicated to God under the control of the Holy Spirit and He intended them to be obedient to Him as people cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ. Here is a very different view from that of the world!



Those God has chosen and brought into His family as His people are indeed privileged beyond all comparison. Out of this blessing comes the opportunity of a life time: service to God. In 1 Peter 2:1-10, the apostle Peter defines this opportunity with graphic images, many of which are drawn from the Old Testament and re-applied to Christians as the new people of God. Hear his words to us:

1 Rid yourselves, therefore, of all malice, and all guile, insincerity, envy, and all slander. 2 Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation — 3 if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.

4 Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and 5 like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. 6 For it stands in scripture: "See, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame." 7 To you then who believe, he is precious; but for those who do not believe, "The stone that the builders rejected has become the very head of the corner," 8 and "A stone that makes them stumble, and a rock that makes them fall." They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.

9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. 10 Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.²

¹GNT: 1:1-2, 1.1 Πέτρος ἀπόστολος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐκλεκτοῖς παρεπιδήμοις διασπορᾶς Πόντου, Γαλατίας, Καπαδοκίας, Ἀσίας καὶ Βιθυνίας, 1.2 κατὰ πρόγνωσιν θεοῦ πατρός ἐν ἀγιασμῷ πνεύματος εἰς ὑπακοὴν καὶ ῥαντισμὸν αἵματος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη πληθυνθεῖη.

²GNT: 2.1 Ἀποθέμενοι οὖν πᾶσαν κακίαν καὶ πάντα δόλον καὶ ὑποκρίσεις καὶ φθόνους καὶ πάσας καταλαλίαις, 2.2 ὡς ἀρτιγέννητα βρέφη τὸ λογικὸν ἄδολον γάλα ἐπιποθήσατε, ἵνα ἐν αὐτῷ αὐξηθῆτε εἰς σωτηρίαν, 2.3 εἰ ἐγεύσασθε ὅτι χρηστὸς ὁ κύριος. 2.4 πρὸς ὃν προσερχόμενοι λίθον ζῶντα ὑπὸ ἀνθρώπων μὲν ἀποδοκιμασμένον παρὰ δὲ θεῷ ἐκλεκτὸν ἔντιμον, 2.5 καὶ αὐτοὶ ὡς λίθοι ζῶντες οἰκοδομεῖσθε οἶκος πνευματικὸς εἰς ἱεράτευμα ἅγιον ἀνευρέγκαί πνευματικᾶς θυσίας εὐπροσδέκτους τῷ θεῷ διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. 2.6 διότι περιέχει ἐν γραφῇ,

Ἰδοὺ τίθημι ἐν Σιών λίθον

Although many things could be said from these verses, I want to focus on but two emphases, both of which are built around the central image used by Peter in this passage. The height of our privilege is that in the New Covenant believers have become the new temple of God on the earth.

The Jewish temple in Jerusalem was understood to be the dwelling place of God on earth, but in less than a decade after Peter dictated these words to Silas to be written down (cf. 5:12), the Jerusalem temple was gone. The Romans crushed the Jewish rebellion of the late 60s and in the process destroyed both Jerusalem and the temple in 70 AD. Jesus in the late 20s of the first century, some 40 years earlier, had predicted this was going to happen (cf. Matt. 24:1-2). Peter saw a new spiritual reality emerging out of the redemptive work of Jesus: God was going to build a new temple. This time it would not be made with stones and mortar. Instead, it would be composed of redeemed humanity -- both Jew and Gentile -- who would collectively become God's dwelling place on earth. And this new humanity called Christians would both compose the temple and would serve God as priests as well. The church is both where God is found in this world, and the church functions as God's priests in service to Him.

Peter speaks basically of this new temple and the kind of material God is using to construct it. And what this temple is for.

BODY

I. We are being used to build God's temple, v. 5, 1-3

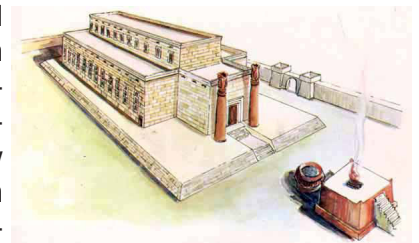
5 like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

2.5 καὶ αὐτοὶ ὡς λίθοι ζῶντες οἰκοδομεῖσθε οἶκος πνευματικὸς εἰς ἱεράτευμα ἅγιον ἀνενέγκαι πνευματικὰς θυσίας εὐπροσδέκτους τῷ θεῷ διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.

1 Rid yourselves, therefore, of all malice, and all guile, insincerity, envy, and all slander. 2 Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation — 3 if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.

2.1 Ἀποθέμενοι οὖν πᾶσαν κακίαν καὶ πάντα δόλον καὶ ὑποκρίσεις καὶ φθόνους καὶ πάσας καταλαλιὰς, 2.2 ὡς ἀρτιγέννητα βρέφη τὸ λογικὸν ἄδολον γάλα ἐπιποθήσατε, ἵνα ἐν αὐτῷ αὐξηθῆτε εἰς σωτηρίαν, 2.3 εἰ ἐγεύσασθε ὅτι χρηστὸς ὁ κύριος.

A New Temple. Beginning with the tabernacle that the Israelites used from the time of the exodus from Egypt until Solomon built the first Jewish temple in Jerusalem, the belief was that God's dwelling place on earth primarily was inside the Holy of Holies that was located in the center of the tabernacle and then of the temple. Clearly, this was the only place the Hebrew people could meet God in forgiveness of sin on the Day of Atonement. With the building of the temple by Solomon in the tenth century BCE, this conviction grew even stronger among the Israelite people. With the destruction of the temple in 583 BCE by the Babylonians, there came a religious crisis in Israel. Where could one find God? The prophets from the time of Amos and Hosea in the eight century on had warned Israel that God was bigger than a temple, and that His presence wasn't limited to the temple in Jerusalem. But with the restoration of the Jewish exiles from Babylon in the late 500s under Ezra and Nehemiah, one of the first actions of the returning Jews to Jerusalem was to rebuild the temple. To be certain, it was but a shadow of Solomon's temple. But the people were determined to re-build a place 'for God to dwell' on this earth. This greatly down-sized temple continued to be the center of Jewish worship through the four



Solomon's temple

ἀκρογωνιαῖον ἐκλεκτὸν ἔντιμον
καὶ ὁ πιστεύων ἐπ' αὐτῷ οὐ μὴ καταισχυνηθῆ.

2.7 ὑμῖν οὖν ἡ τιμὴ τοῖς πιστεύουσιν, ἀπιστοῦσιν δὲ
λίθος ὃν ἀπεδοκίμασαν οἱ οἰκοδομοῦντες,
οὗτος ἐγενήθη εἰς κεφαλὴν γωνίας

2.8 καὶ
λίθος προσκόμματος
καὶ πέτρα σκανδάλου· οἱ προσκόπτουσιν τῷ λόγῳ ἀπειθοῦντες εἰς ὃ καὶ ἐτέθησαν.

2.9 Ὑμεῖς δὲ γένος ἐκλεκτὸν, βασιλεῖον ἱεράτευμα, ἔθνος ἅγιον, λαὸς εἰς περιποίησιν, ὅπως τὰς ἀρετὰς ἐξαγγείλητε τοῦ ἐκ σκότους ὑμᾶς καλέσαντος εἰς τὸ θαυμαστὸν αὐτοῦ φῶς·

2.10 οἳ ποτε οὐ λαὸς
νῦν δὲ λαὸς θεοῦ,
οἱ οὐκ ἠλεημένοι
νῦν δὲ ἐλεηθέντες.

hundred years between the Old and New Testament eras. When Herod the Great came to power shortly before the beginning of the Christian era, one of his many construction projects was to renovate this temple. Given his arrogance and extravagance he enlarged the size of the temple to become much larger than even Solomon's temple centuries before. It was made much more extravagant and elaborate than ever before. Once again the belief became wide spread among the Jews of that time that God could be worshiped only in Jerusalem at the temple. Unmistakably the belief was that divine forgiveness could only be found through the sacrifices offered in the Jerusalem temple. And especially in the fall of the year during the Day of Atonement festival.



Herod's temple

But Jesus rattled the disciples severely when on Thursday evening before His arrest, he and the disciples walked past the temple from the upper room to the Garden of Gethsemane. As they were leaving the temple area crossing Kidron to the Mount of Olives, "his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the temple. Then he asked them, 'You see all these, do you not? Truly I tell you, not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down.'" (Mt. 24:1-2) The Lord knew that the Jewish people had once more blinded themselves to the might and power of God. In their rejection of Jesus as their Messiah, God's judgment would fall upon them again with the destruction of both Jerusalem and the temple of Herod. Under the Romans in about 70 AD this prediction of Jesus came to pass in a massive destruction of the city and of the temple.³

From the teaching of Jesus gradually there emerged the understanding that in the New Covenant, God was going to do things differently. The apostles came to realize that the new temple that God was establishing in this world was entirely different from the Jerusalem temple. Both Paul and Peter make similar points in their letters.

In Paul's writings note the following:

Eph. 2:21-22 (NRSV): "In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God."⁴

1 Cor. 3:9 (NRSV): "you are God's field; God's building."⁵

Additionally Peter makes the point in verse five very clearly: "like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." Believers are compared to 'living stones' (ὡς λίθοι ζῶντες) that are being used to build a 'spiritual house' (οἰκοδομεῖσθε οἶκος πνευματικὸς). The Jerusalem temple was constructed with massive stones as the core construction material. Some of those can still be seen today in the 'wailing wall' that is the remaining part of Herod's temple that wasn't destroyed by the Romans.

But in God's new temple no dead stones are used. Instead the 'stones' being used are 'living.'⁶ God is using the people redeemed by Christ to build His new temple. This radical concept from Christianity departed dramatically from Jewish understanding. God dwells in the midst of His people. Both Jews and Christians affirm this. But to ancient Jews, this meant the physical temple in Jerusalem. To Jesus and the apostles, it meant the community of believers.

The apostle John graphically portrays this in the introduction to his gospel in Jhn 1:14 (NRSV):

³Unfortunately, some segments of radically conservative Judaism believe today that the Jerusalem temple must be rebuilt on the exact spot where Herod's temple existed. But the Moslem mosque, the Dome of the Rock, happens to be in the way. Thus the passion of this segment of contemporary Judaism constantly seeks an excuse to destroy this Islamic worship center so that construction work on the new Jewish temple can begin. This is connected to the mistaken belief that the Jewish Messiah has not yet come. But when he does, this temple will be built and the sacrificial system of Judaism will be restored. What to me is even more dumb founding is that some fringe elements of ultra conservative Christianity have bought into this nonsense and thus support the efforts of these Jews to begin this process of re-building the Jewish temple. This is one of the great religious heresies of our day!

⁴GNT: 2.19 ἄρα οὖν οὐκέτι ἐστὲ ξένοι καὶ πάροικοι ἀλλὰ ἐστὲ συμπολίται τῶν ἁγίων καὶ οἰκεῖοι τοῦ θεοῦ, 2.20 ἐποικοδομηθέντες ἐπὶ τῷ θεμελίῳ τῶν ἀποστόλων καὶ προφητῶν, ὄντος ἀκρογωνιαίου αὐτοῦ Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ, **2.21 ἐν ᾧ πάσα οἰκοδομὴ συναρμολογουμένη αὐξεῖ εἰς ναὸν ἅγιον ἐν κυρίῳ, 2.22 ἐν ᾧ καὶ ὑμεῖς συνοικοδομεῖσθε εἰς κατοικητήριον τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν πνεύματι.**

⁵GNT: 3.9 θεοῦ γὰρ ἐσμεν συνεργοί, θεοῦ γεώργιοι, θεοῦ οἰκοδομὴ ἐστε.

⁶For the Greek verb as a participle adjective see BADG: "**to be life-productive, offer life** ptc. used w. respect to things (SIG 1173 [138 A.D.], 5 ζῶσαι ἀρεταὶ ἐγένοντο=miracles full of divine life occurred) λόγια ζῶντα words that meant life Ac 7:38. λόγος ζῶν θεοῦ 1 Pt 1:23; cp. Hb 4:12. ὁδὸς ζῶσα a living way 10:20. ἐλπίς ζῶσα a living hope 1 Pt 1:3.—ζ. is also used of things which serve as descriptions of pers. who communicate divine life: of Christ ὁ ἄρτος ὁ ζῶν J 6:51a. λίθος ζῶν 1 Pt 2:4. Of Christians: θυσία ζῶσα a living sacrifice Ro 12:1. λίθοι ζῶντες 1 Pt 2:5.—τὰ παρὰ ζώσης φωνῆς καὶ μενούσης the (words) of a living and abiding voice Papias (2:4) (opp. ἐκ τῶν βιβλίων).—Lit. s. ζωή end. DELG s.v. ζῶω.M-M. TW."

[William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 426.]

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.⁷

Literally, John declares that Jesus as the Logos of God set up his tabernacle presence in the midst of the believing community, much as God instructed Moses to set up the ancient Jewish tabernacle in the exodus. When the Israelites dedicated the ancient tabernacle the Glory of God, the divine presence, descended in smoke and fire upon the tabernacle, letting them know that God was present in all His power and might in their midst. But with the coming of Jesus into this world as the Word of God, John declares that the believing community, the 'we' of the verb, was able to gaze upon the Glory of God, the divine presence, in even greater fashion than ancient Israel. In Jesus we see all the grace and truth of Almighty God. And God is in our midst, making the community of faith His dwelling place on earth. Thus as Peter declares, we are a 'spiritual house' in contrast to a physical building. God is actively present and at work in us as His new temple.

The NRSV translates the Greek verb οἰκοδομεῖσθε as an imperative: "let yourselves be built...". This is certainly possible grammatically, but most scholars take the verb as indicative, stating what is happening.⁸ God is the builder; the stones don't build themselves. As individuals come to Jesus, also the 'living corner stone' in God's temple (cf. v. 4), God takes each one and incorporates it into His house. We must yield ourselves to Jesus and allow God to place us into His temple as He chooses. The passive voice of the Greek verb highlights that believers themselves have nothing to do with the building of God's temple. It is God alone who takes us into His new temple. We don't earn a right to be used as a building stone; we certainly don't merit such use.

Purpose of this new temple: "to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (εἰς ἱεράτευμα ἅγιον ἀνεύγκαι πνευματικὰς θυσίας εὐπροσδέκτους τῷ θεῷ διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ). Here Peter mixes his images. The church is both the temple and the priesthood serving in the temple. Our role as a part of God's new temple is described in terms of the Jewish priesthood that served God in the Jerusalem temple. Once God takes us into His House, He assigns us a job: that of a priest.

Peter describes this work in several ways.

We are a 'holy priesthood' (ἱεράτευμα ἅγιον). Here is the scriptural basis for the distinctive Baptist doctrine of the 'priesthood of every believer.' A strong emphasis on this biblical truth has characterized Baptists since their beginning some 400 years ago.

What does this mean? First, we are priests in God's new temple. We're not spectator worshippers! We're priests! We don't come to church just to enjoy ourselves! And to watch others do the work of leading worship! The priests in ancient Israel did the work of worship. They took the animal and meal offerings of the people, and then presented them to God on the great altar outside the Holy of Holies. They kept the temple clean and properly prepared for worship. They sang the songs of worship and praise in the worship services. They offered the prayers up to God. In short, they worked; they didn't sit down and watch others do the work. In the same way in God's new temple, these 'living stones' become priests carrying out the work of worship and service to God.

This is the identical emphasis of Paul in Eph. 4:13 with the 'work of ministry' (εἰς ἔργον διακονίας, εἰς οἰκοδομὴν τοῦ σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ) theme that the saints of God are to be doing. As Paul defines this εἰς οἰκοδομὴν τοῦ σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ, the ministry of the saints is to 'build up the body of Christ.' I remind you again that this theme has been the central focus of my two year ministry with you. The IBC church Cologne is under divine mandate: become a ministering congregation serving Christ. Or, to use Peter's image: become functioning priests in the new temple of God. This church will never be strong until this goal is achieved in significant manner.

Second, Peter says we are to be a 'holy priesthood' (ἱεράτευμα ἅγιον). Most importantly, 'holy' (ἅγιον) means 'dedicated to God.' Just as the Jerusalem priests were completely set apart to serve God, so also is EVERY BELIEVER! In the true church of Christ, there is no priest and laity. European Christianity has been plagued with this perversion of the teachings of the New Testament for centuries. It has falsely created the opinion that only a select few of God's people need to be fully dedicated to God, i.e., the priests. Everyone else, the laity, do not have to be so dedicated. Heresy! False teaching! Absolutely no basis for this exists in the New Testament. To the contrary, Peter makes it abundantly clear that every believer is to be a dedicated priest in the new temple of God.

⁷GNT: 1.14 Καὶ ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο καὶ ἐσκήνωσεν ἐν ἡμῖν, καὶ ἐθεασάμεθα τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ, δόξαν ὡς μονογενοῦς παρὰ πατρός, πλήρης χάριτος καὶ ἀληθείας.

⁸"The verb οἰκοδομεῖσθε continues the imagery of 'living stones' and must be understood as an indicative, not an imperative (cf. Hort, 109). Even within a metaphor, stones cannot be commanded to 'be built up' (passive) or to 'build themselves up' (middle), for that initiative rests with the builder. The metaphor makes sense only if Peter is affirming that in fact Christian believers are being built like stones so as to become a certain kind of edifice." [J. Ramsey Michaels, vol. 49, *Word Biblical Commentary : 1 Peter, Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 102]

Holy stresses a level of unconditional commitment to God and to serve Him. The Greek term ἅγιον, translated as holy, makes this point as the foundational idea. From the time of the eight century prophets onward the Old Testament concept of holiness stressed the behavior and ethical aspect as growing out of full dedication to God. Peter puts special emphasis upon this in 1:15-16 of his letter: “Instead, as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct, for it is written, ‘you shall be holy, for I am holy.’”⁹ Unholy priests were disqualified from service in the temple. They would be removed from service and prohibited even from entering the inner courts of the temple, until they had completed the required purification rituals that included repentance from their sins. When God’s people in the new temple try to serve Him in unholiness God doesn’t accept that service. The ministry of the church is crippled. We are to be a holy people living in righteousness. The standard of measuring that is defined clearly by Peter in 1:16 with his quote of Lev. 11:44 et als: “You shall be holy, for I am holy.” We are to commit ourselves to living at the same level of holiness that characterizes our God. Nothing less than that is acceptable to God.

This is at the heart of the moral admonitions in 2:1-3 (NRSV):

1 Rid yourselves, therefore, of all malice, and all guile, insincerity, envy, and all slander. 2 Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation — 3 if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.¹⁰

Peter pleads with his readers to clean up their lives. He names five vices¹¹ that they are to get rid of in their lives. These contradict the commitment to Christian love advocated in 1:22.¹² They focus on attitudes and actions that tear down one another, rather than build up each other. Love builds up; these tear down. These things must be taken out of our lives! In their place must come a passionate desire for the Word of Christ, the ‘pure, spiritual milk.’ The language of Peter compares the teachings of Christ and the apostles to ‘mother’s milk’ for newborn babies. Just as passionately as new babies long for their mother’s milk, believers must long for the words of Christ, for the Word of God. Only by this nourishment can one turn away from the destructive vices. Only by this nourishment can one fill his or her life with brotherly love.

Don’t think for a moment that you can come into the church, get baptized, and then sit down to watch others serve. And even worse, think that you can continue living just as you were before coming to Christ! Such thinking is spiritual suicide! And it will grease the path straight into eternal damnation for you!

The church, Peter declares, is to be made up of holy priests faithfully serving God in unconditional commitment and behavior. Nothing less is acceptable to God! I appeal to you as the members of the IBC church to make this your serious commitment to God. May this church indeed become a holy temple with holy priests faithfully serving God.

We are to “offer spiritual sacrifices” (ἀνεύγκαι πνευματικὰς θυσίας εὐπροσδέκτους τῷ θεῷ διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ). What are we as holy priests to be doing? Within the imagery of the Jerusalem temple priests, Peter declares that we are to be offering up sacrifices to God.¹³ The temple priests in Jerusalem would receive the required offerings for sacrifice from the Jewish men at the entrance to the Court of Israel. Both the animal and meal offerings would be examined to certify that they met the requirements for sacrifice. Once accepted,

⁹GNT: 1:15 ἀλλὰ κατὰ τὸν καλέσαντα ὑμᾶς ἅγιον καὶ αὐτοὶ ἅγιοι ἐν πάσῃ ἀναστροφῇ γενήθητε, ^{1:16}διότι γέγραπται [ὅτι] Ἅγιοι ἔσεσθε, ὅτι ἐγὼ ἅγιος [εἶμι].

¹⁰GNT: 2:1 Ἀποθέμενοι οὖν πᾶσαν κακίαν καὶ πάντα δόλον καὶ ὑποκρίσεις καὶ φθόρους καὶ πάσας καταλαλιάς, ^{2:2}ὡς ἀρτιγέννητα βρέφη τὸ λογικὸν ἄδολον γάλα ἐπιποθήσατε, ἵνα ἐν αὐτῷ αὐξηθῆτε εἰς σωτηρίαν, ^{2:3}εἰ ἐγεύσασθε ὅτι χρηστὸς ὁ κύριος.

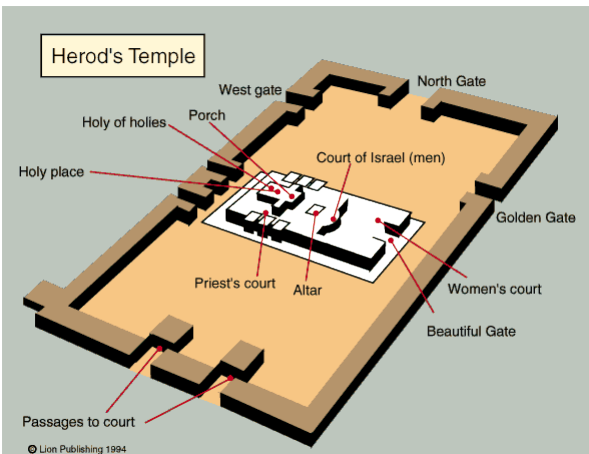
¹¹“What follows is a list of vices to be avoided. Such lists are quite common in the New Testament (for example, Rom 1:29, 30; 2 Cor 12:20; Eph 4:31; Col 3:8; 1 Tim 1:9, 10), and were used by the early church as part of teaching new converts, a practice which was common among both Jews and Greeks. In 1 Peter, the list concentrates on evil practices which are incompatible with Christian love as mentioned in 1:22.” [Daniel C. Arichea and Eugene Albert Nida, *A Handbook on the First Letter from Peter, UBS handbook series; Helps for translators* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1994), 49]

¹²1:22 (NRSV): “Now that you have purified your souls by your obedience to the truth so that you have genuine mutual love, love one another deeply from the heart.”

GNT: 1:22 Τὰς ψυχὰς ὑμῶν ἡγνικότες ἐν τῇ ὑπακοῇ τῆς ἀληθείας εἰς φιλαδελφίαν ἀνυπόκριτον, ἐκ καθαρᾶς καρδίας ἀλλήλους ἀγαπήσατε ἐκτενῶς...

¹³“The function of believers as holy priests is to offer spiritual and acceptable sacrifices to God through Jesus Christ (literally ‘spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God’). For spiritual, see above. The basic distinction here is between the material (for example, animal) sacrifices offered by the Jewish priests, and the spiritual sacrifices of the new Israel, that is, the sacrifices which are inspired by the Spirit of God. These sacrifices are not specified beyond the description that they are spiritual. Elsewhere in the New Testament, some of these sacrifices are enumerated (for example, ‘good deeds,’ Heb 13:16; Philippians 4:18; ‘worship,’ Heb 13:15; Rev 7:15; ‘praise and thanksgiving to God,’ Heb 13:15 and following; and ‘mutual sharing’).” [Daniel C. Arichea and Eugene Albert Nida, *A Handbook on the First Letter from Peter, UBS handbook series; Helps for translators* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1994), 57]

the animals would be properly slaughtered on the north side of the Great Altar and a portion of the blood and meat would then be placed on the Great Altar where a fire burned continually to consume the offerings. A proper portion of the grain offerings would also be placed in the fire on the Great Altar once accepted by the priests. The rest was kept as a food supply for the priests while serving in the temple. The Jewish male worshipers would then watch and listen as all this took place. The women would not be allowed to go this far into the temple. So they did not even see how the sacrifices were made. The Gentile converts to Judaism were not even permitted to enter the Court of the Women. Instead they were restricted to the outer Court of the Gentiles and, like the Jewish women, could only listen to what was taking place in the inner Court of the Priests when the sacrifices were presented on the Great Altar. According to ancient Jewish records, elaborate rituals had been developed for each segment of the sacrificial process by the priests.



Peter makes it very clear that believers in the new temple are not to offer up such sacrifices to God. With the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, the Jerusalem temple sacrificial system has come to an end and no longer has validity with God.¹⁴ What believers are to offer up to God in the new temple are 'spiritual sacrifices' (πνευματικὰς θυσίας). Peter doesn't spell out specific sacrifices here. Elsewhere in the New Testament such sacrifices are designated as 'good works' (Heb. 13:16); 'financial support of missionaries' (Phil. 4:18); 'material sharing with others' (Heb. 13:16); 'praise to God' (Heb. 13:15).

What Peter stresses here are the sacrifices prompted by the leadership of the Holy Spirit. These include the 'fruit of the Spirit' in Gal. 5:22-23. What we do in service to God must be prompted and guided by God's Spirit. Apart from His leadership our sacrifices lose their validity before God. Peter adds that these 'spiritual sacrifices' are to be those that are 'acceptable to God through Jesus Christ' (εὐπροσδέκτους τῷ θεῷ διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ).

II. We are made worthy building material, vv. 4, 6-10

4 Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and...

6 For it stands in scripture: "See, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame." 7 To you then who believe, he is precious; but for those who do not believe, "The stone that the builders rejected has become the very head of the corner," 8 and "A stone that makes them stumble, and a rock that makes them fall." They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.

9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. 10 Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy

2.4 πρὸς ὃν προσερχόμενοι λίθον ζῶντα ὑπὸ ἀνθρώπων μὲν ἀποδοκιμασμένον παρὰ δὲ θεῷ ἐκλεκτὸν ἔντιμον,

...

2.6 διότι περιέχει ἐν γραφῇ,

Ἰδοὺ τίθημι ἐν Σιών λίθον

ἀκρογωνιαῖον ἐκλεκτὸν ἔντιμον

καὶ ὁ πιστεύων ἐπ' αὐτῷ οὐ μὴ κατασχυνηθῆ.

2.7 ὑμῖν οὖν ἡ τιμὴ τοῖς πιστεύουσιν, ἀπιστοῦσιν δὲ

λίθος ὃν ἀπεδοκίμασαν οἱ οἰκοδομοῦντες,

οὗτος ἐγενήθη εἰς κεφαλὴν γωνίας

2.8 καὶ

λίθος προσκόμματος

καὶ πέτρα σκανδάλου· οἱ προσκόπτουσιν τῷ λόγῳ ἀπειθῶντες εἰς ὃ καὶ ἐτέθησαν.

2.9 Ὑμεῖς δὲ γένος ἐκλεκτὸν, βασιλεῖον ἱεράτευμα, ἔθνος ἅγιον, λαὸς εἰς περιποίησιν, ὅπως τὰς ἀρετὰς

¹⁴Cf. Heb 10:11-14 (NRSV): "11 And every priest stands day after day at his service, offering again and again the same sacrifices that can never take away sins. 12 But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, 'he sat down at the right hand of God,' 13 and since then has been waiting 'until his enemies would be made a footstool for his feet.' 14 For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified."

ἐξαγγείλητε τοῦ ἐκ σκότους ὑμᾶς καλέσαντος εἰς τὸ θαυμαστὸν αὐτοῦ φῶς·

2.10 οἱ ποτε οὐ λαὸς
νῦν δὲ λαὸς θεοῦ,
οἱ οὐκ ἠλεημένοι
νῦν δὲ ἐλεηθέντες.

Christ as the cornerstone, vv. 4, 6-8.¹⁵ For sinful humanity to become the new temple of God a radical transformation is required. Peter makes it clear that only by ‘coming to Jesus’ is such transformation possible. Verses 4, 6-8 make this point emphatically.

Peter takes the ideas in Isaiah 28:16 and identifies the cornerstone¹⁶ with Christ as the principle building block of the new temple (cf. v. 6):¹⁷

therefore thus says the Lord God, See, I am laying in Zion a foundation stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation: ‘One who trusts will not panic.’

He then pulls Psalm 118:22 and Isaiah 8:14 into the string of Old Testament quotes.

Ps. 118:22 (NRSV; cf. v. 7): “The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.”

Isaiah 8:14 (NRSV; cf. v. 8): “He will become a sanctuary, a stone one strikes against; for both houses of Israel he will become a rock one stumbles over -- a trap and a snare for the inhabitants of Jerusalem.”

The apostle Peter uses this string of Old Testament references to a cornerstone to communicate his understanding of this new temple that God is building, and he especially sees Christ as the ‘cornerstone’ of this temple.

The only way a person can become a ‘living stone’ in this new temple is by coming to Jesus as the cornerstone (v. 4): “Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God’s sight” (πρὸς ὃν προσερχόμενοι λίθον ζῶντα ὑπὸ ἀνθρώπων μὲν ἀποδοδοκιμασμένον παρὰ δὲ θεῶ ἐκλεκτὸν ἔντιμον). This cornerstone is also a ‘living stone’ (λίθον ζῶντα), a ‘chosen stone’, (ἐκλεκτὸν) and a ‘precious stone’ (ἔντιμον) to God (παρὰ θεῶ). To be sure, Christ was rejected by men (ὑπὸ ἀνθρώπων μὲν ἀποδοδοκιμασμένον), but not by God. Peter sees the Psalm 118 declaration of the rejection of the cornerstone as illustrating the principle of rejection of Christ by sinners, and especially by the Jerusalem religious leaders.

If God has esteemed Christ as the cornerstone of His new temple, then we who are ‘living stones’ like Jesus should value Christ the same way. We must not make the mistake of others who rejected Christ. In their

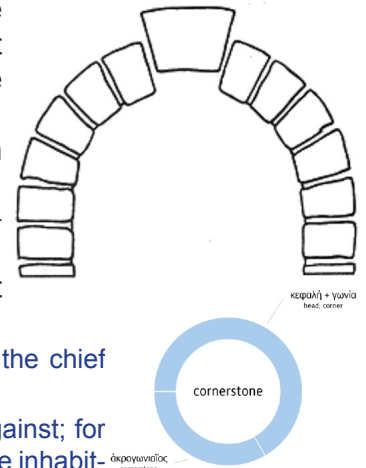
¹⁵“CORNERSTONE Stone laid at the corner to bind two walls together and to strengthen them. Used symbolically as a symbol of strength and prominence in the Bible. The figure is often applied to rulers or leaders (Pss. 118:22; 144:12; Isa. 19:13 NIV, REB, NASB; Zech. 10:4). God promised through Isaiah that Zion would be restored, resting on the cornerstone of the renewed faith of Israel (Isa. 28:16). Jeremiah declared that Babylon would be so utterly devastated that nothing useful would remain, not even a stone for use in a foundation (Jer. 51:26).” [Chad Brand, Charles Draper, Archie England et al., *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 349-50.]

¹⁶In the Greek New Testament two expressions are translated as cornerstone: 1) ἡ κεφαλὴ τῆς γωνίας and 2) ἀκρογωνιαίος, α, ον. The latter is used here:

“ἀκρογωνιαίος, α, ον (purely biblical; TestSol) lying at the extreme corner ἄ. λίθος cornerstone (this meaning is defended by JArmitage Robinson, Eph; ESelwyn, 1 Pt; TAbbott, ICC Eph-Col; JPfammater, Die Kirche als Bau: Analecta Gregoriana 110, ’60, 140–51; KSchäfer, Lapis summus angulari: Festschr. HLützel ’62, 9–29; ibid. Zur Deutung von ἄ. Eph 2:20: Festschr. JSchmid ’63, 218–24) or capstone (TestSol 22:7–23:4; s. κεφαλὴ 2b; rejected by RMcKelvey who defends cornerstone, NTS 8, ’61/62, 352–59), only fig., of Christ Eph 2:20; w. ref. to the preciousness of the material λίθον ἐκλεκτὸν ἄ. ἔντιμον 1 Pt 2:6 (s. comm.); B 6:2 (both Is 28:16); s. lit. on κεφαλὴ 2b.—Cp. pap and ins cited DGE s.v. γωνιαῖος. KSchelkle, RAC I, 233f. EDNT. M-M. TW.” [William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 39-40.]

¹⁷“In keeping with the χρηστὸς ὁ κύριος at the end of v 3, he comes to ecclesiology by way of Christology. For a third time (cf. 1:16, 24–25) he makes a formal appeal to the Scriptures with a LXX quotation introduced by διότι (v 6). The formal quotation (from Isa 28:16) draws to itself two others (Ps 117[118]:22; Isa 8:14) linked to the first by the common designation “stone” (λίθος) for Jesus Christ. Peter uses the quotations to emphasize the identity of his readers as “believers” in contrast to the “unbelievers” or “disobedient” with whom they were in daily contact in the provinces of Asia Minor (vv 7–8).

Nowhere else in the NT are the three “stone” references brought together. Paul in Rom 9:33 weaves the two Isaiah passages into a single quotation by placing Isa 8:14 in the framework of Isa 28:16. The “stone of stumbling” of the former passage is clearly his immediate center of interest (v 32), but in 10:11 Paul again picks up the last phrase of Isa 28:16, “No one who believes in him will be put to shame.” The textual similarities between the quotations in Romans and in 1 Peter (in significant deviation from the LXX) suggest either a direct literary relationship or the independent use of a distinctive textual tradition, possibly attributable to an early collection of scriptural testimonies to Jesus as the Messiah (Ellis, 89–90; C. H. Dodd, *According to the Scriptures*, 41–43).” [J. Ramsey Michaels, vol. 49, *Word Biblical Commentary : 1 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 96]



blindness they could not see what God was up to in Christ. They had no idea that God was going to destroy the Jerusalem temple, but decades beforehand He would begin building a new temple using Christ as the anchor point that would hold this new temple together.

And so the question comes to you today: What are you doing with Jesus? How do you see Him? What value do you attach to Him?

New building material, vv. 9-10. From Peter's 'stone theology' in vv. 4-8, he moves to listing a number of images that define the new people of God who make up this new temple that God inhabits.¹⁸ This building material of sinners has achieved a marvelous new status before God, one that matches and surpasses that of Covenant Israel.

These living stones collectively now are:

A chosen race (γένος ἐκλεκτόν). The honorific title here doesn't mean that through the church God is creating a new race of people. Rather, it affirms a new group of people distinctive and different are being formed by God. And those who make up this group have been divinely chosen by God Himself. They didn't volunteer to join; God chose them, just as earlier He chose the Israelites out of all the peoples of the world to be His covenant people.

A royal priesthood (βασιλειον ἱεράτευμα). These people whom God chose not only become a select people but they become priests in the new temple. And their service in the temple is 'royal', that is, they are serving the King of Kings in His temple.

A holy nation (ἔθνος ἅγιον). Just as ancient Israel was intended to be set apart in exclusive dedication to God, now the living stones in the new temple comprise a 'holy nation', that is set apart exclusively to serve and honor God.

God's own people (λαὸς εἰς περιποίησιν). The new temple is comprised of a special people whom God completely owns as His.¹⁹ The believing community stands now as God's exclusive people, honored and esteemed by God as His very own possession.

People with a mission (ὅπως τὰς ἀρετὰς ἐξαγγείλητε τοῦ ἐκ σκότους ὑμᾶς καλέσαντος εἰς τὸ θαυμαστὸν αὐτοῦ φῶς). Just as ancient Israel had a mission (Isa. 43:20-21), that mission now has been given to the church as God's new people. We are to proclaim the praises of the God who has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light.

Peter then closes out this praise of the new people of God with the use of language from Hosea 2:23; 1:6, 9; 2:1, that celebrates this unbelievable blessing of God:

Once you were not a people,
but now you are God's people;
once you had not received mercy,
but now you have received mercy.

οἱ ποτε οὐ λαὸς
νῦν δὲ λαὸς θεοῦ,
οἱ οὐκ ἠλεημένοι
νῦν δὲ ἐλεηθέντες.

Wow! God took 'living stones' from all nations and with Christ began building Himself a new temple to inhabit in this world. Nothing attractive or meritorious was present in these stones. But under the powerful handiwork of Almighty God these living stones have become an esteemed people of God Himself. We are those living stones. We have been transformed into this beautiful temple by coming to Jesus. The Lord is working on us as we grow spiritually. The result? His temple becomes more majestic and attractive all the time, as His people grow up in Him.

¹⁸"In the last two verses of this section, the author now turns his attention once more to his readers, particularly in their corporate existence as a believing community. Using the Old Testament liberally, he ascribes to the Christian community the titles applied to Israel. The conclusion is inevitable that here the church is described as the new Israel, although the thought perhaps is not that the church has supplanted Israel, but that God's people should be what the church is now, namely, a community not bound to one nation or blood, but encompassing all nations and all peoples." [[Daniel C. Arichea and Eugene Albert Nida, *A Handbook on the First Letter from Peter*, UBS handbook series; *Helps for translators* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1994), 61]

"All four of these titles of honor (or five, depending on how they are counted) appear to be adaptations of titles from either Exod 19:6 or Isa 43:20-21, and were therefore originally designations of Israel as the people of God (cf. the specific phrase, "people of God," in v 10). With the use of these titles, Peter makes explicit his basis for consistently addressing his Gentile Christian readers as if they were Jews (see Comment on 1:1)." [J. Ramsey Michaels, vol. 49, *Word Biblical Commentary : 1 Peter*, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 100]

¹⁹περιποίησιν: "③ that which is acquired, possessing, possession, property (PTebt loc. cit.) λαὸς εἰς περιποίησιν a people that has become (God's own) possession 1 Pt 2:9 (cp. Mal 3:17). ἀπολύτρωσις τῆς π. Eph 1:14 (s. ἀπολύτρωσις 2a).—DELG s.v. ποιέω. M-M. Spicq." [William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 804.]

CONCLUSION

My people, God has blessed you and me beyond counting. We are indeed a privileged people who enjoy the marvelous position of being "God's people." From our text we learn that this means God is using us to build His new temple in this world. We are the very dwelling place of God on this earth. With this comes the privilege of service to God, for we also are not only 'living stones' in this temple but also a holy priesthood dedicated to serving God.

God help us to be faithful priests serving Him day and night, day in and day out, all of our lives. May we never ever do anything to stain and contaminate this temple of our God.