

## Standing Fast in the Grace of God

# **“Built Up” Together**

## **The Spiritual Preparation God Requires to Build His People Together**

### **1 Peter 2:1-5**

As we began this study of 1 Peter, we found Peter writing to believers that were scattered and undergoing (or about to undergo) persecution for their faith. They misunderstood (as we sometimes do) these trials and the hostility they experienced from the world around them. So, we find the Holy Spirit inspiring Peter to begin with the great blessings we have in our salvation – our new birth, our living hope, our inheritance reserved in heaven (1:3-5). He speaks of trials that refine faith (1:6-7), of love for Christ whom we have not seen (1:8), and then he moves to the nature of this new life in Christ, which has been brought about by the incorruptible Word of God (1:23-25).

Those truths about the Word of God in the final few verses of chapter 1 flow directly into our text for this message. It is because believers have been “born again...by the word of God” that we can, and must, grow by that Word and be conformed (shaped) into the kind of people God can build together into His “spiritual house.”

It is important to recognize that Peter is not writing just to, or about, individual Christians “scattered throughout” the Roman Empire (1:1), but to a people whom God wants to fit together, even under the pressure of persecution, to demonstrate His glory. And if God is going to be able to “build us together” as a church, there are some things that have to be removed, some appetites that must be cultivated, and a continual drawing near to Christ that must take place.

The verses before us show the spiritual preparation that must occur before we can reflect the identity Peter will

unfold in the next portion of this chapter (vs. 6-10) – a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and a people for God’s own possession. The preparation begins individually, in the heart and attitudes of each believer, but it is essential for what God is doing corporately (for the church) – building His people together into a unified body (the church) that displays His glory.

With that in mind, the passage before us is not simply about personal spiritual growth, as I emphasized when I preached verses 1-3 last year. It is also about the inner spiritual preparation of individual believers that enables God’s outer work of building His church.

## **I. THE PURIFYING OF THE BELIEVER’S LIFE – VS. 1**

Peter begins with what we must remove rather than what we must add. In other words, spiritual growth (individually and corporately) requires subtraction before addition. The sins listed in this verse are incompatible with spiritual maturity and are very dangerous to the church.

### **A. The action required: “Laying aside”**

1. The word (ἀποθέμενοι) means to put off, strip away, or renounce. It was used of removing dirty clothing.

Ephesians 4:22

<sup>22</sup> That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts;

Colossians 3:8

<sup>8</sup> But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth.

2. As used here (as an aorist participle), it pictures a decisive act – like stripping off a dirty

garment. Peter is calling believers to make a deliberate break with these relational sins. Even though the action is decisive, it must be repeated whenever these attitudes arise. We cannot “desire the sincere milk of the word” (vs. 2) until we have put these sins away.

## **B. The sins listed are relational, not merely private**

Peter is preparing the believers to become a “spiritual house” (vs. 5), so he names sins that destroy fellowship. This is not to be considered an exhaustive list, but they do represent the sins most destructive to Christian fellowship.

1. “All malice” (κακία) – ill-will, the desire to harm
2. “All guile” (δόλος) – bait, deceit, trickery – the word literally refers to catching fish with bait. By application, deception for personal gain.
3. “Hypocrisies” (ὑπόκρισις) – acting under a mask. Pretending to be better or more spiritual than one actually is.
4. “Envy” (φθόνος) – resentment at another’s blessing. Envy is the seedbed of division and can be the cause of the other sins listed here.
5. “All evil speakings” (καταλαλία) – backbiting, slander, speaking against. These are the quiet assassinations of another’s character.

- A church under the pressure of the culture of this world cannot endure if these sins remain. God cannot build us together while we hold these attitudes.

## **II. THE PASSION OF THE BELIEVER’S APPETITE – VS. 2**

Verse 1 is about removing hinderances; verse 2 is about cultivating desire.

## A. The intensity of the desire

1. The verb “desire” (ἐπιποθήσατε) means to long for, crave earnestly, intensely desire. It is not simply a preference; it is a craving of the soul.

Psalm 42:1 [same Greek word in the LXX]

<sup>1</sup> As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God.

2. Peter is not saying that believers are newborns; he is saying they should have the same intensity of desire that a newborn has for milk.

A baby doesn't politely ask for milk – they cry until they receive some. So should the believer hunger for the Word of God.

## B. The purity of the Word

“The sincere milk of the word”

1. The word for “sincere” (ἄδολον) means without deceit, pure, unmixed. The Word of God is the exact opposite (seen in the alpha privative at the beginning of this Greek word) of the relational sins just mentioned: no malice in it; no deception in it; no hypocrisy in it; no envy in it; and no slander in it.
2. The phrase “milk of the word” uses the adjective form of the word “logos” (λογικός). It means pertaining to reason and therefore reasonable. As used here, it is a reasonable, logical process that the Word of God will transform the mind into what God intends.

## C. The purpose is growth

“That ye may grow thereby”

1. Spiritual birth comes by the Word (1:23) and

spiritual growth comes by the Word (2:2).

2. No believer can outgrow the Word of God – there is always something to learn.

Psalm 119:97

<sup>97</sup> MEM. O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day.

Matthew 4:4

<sup>4</sup> But he answered and said, *It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.*

2 Timothy 3:16-17

<sup>16</sup> All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: <sup>17</sup> That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

- Just as a believer's spiritual strength is tied to their appetite for the Word, their spiritual growth is tied to their appetite for the church. If hunger for God's Word decreases, hunger for God's people will eventually decrease – and when either appetite wanes, growth halts.

### III. THE PERSUASION OF THE BELIEVER'S EXPERIENCE – VS. 3

This verse is the motivation behind the desire in verse 2.

#### A. The Greek construction assumes the condition is true.

The "if so be" (εἰ) plus the indicative verb "ye have tasted" (ἐγεύσασθε) assumes reality. Think of it as, "Since we have tasted that the Lord is gracious..."

#### B. "Tasted" (ἐγεύσασθε) means real experience

It doesn't mean to just sample something, but to experience inwardly and personally. It is used of

Christ “tasting death” (Heb. 2:9) – fully, truly, not superficially.

Hebrews 2:9

<sup>9</sup> But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.

**C. Peter quotes Psalm 34:8**

Psalm 34:8

<sup>8</sup> O taste and see that the LORD *is* good: blessed *is* the man *that* trusteth in him.

Peter alludes to Psalm 34 several more times in this letter: 34:3, 4, 6, 9, 12-16, 19. It seems that Peter expects the suffering believers to return to that Psalm often.

**D. How this drives growth**

1. We have tasted His goodness in salvation: we desire His Word, we trust His hand in trials, and we come to Him continually (vs. 4).
2. A believer who forgets God’s goodness will lose the desire for His Word.

**IV. THE POSITION OF THE BELIEVER’S LIFE IN THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE CHURCH – VS. 4-5**

There is a shift from growth imagery (milk to maturity) to construction imagery (stones to temple), but the two ideas are linked: mature believers become building material.

**A. Our continual approach to Christ (vs. 4)**

1. The phrase “to whom coming” uses a present participle:

- a) Προσερχόμενοι – “continually drawing near”
- b) This is not a one-time act of salvation, but a daily walk of faith.

We come to the Lord (vs. 3) as:

## 2. “A living stone” (λίθον ζῶντα)

This means a stone that possesses life. Peter uses this image to describe Christ as the resurrected, life-giving foundation of God’s spiritual house. He is the cornerstone upon whom the church is built, and the source of the spiritual life that causes the whole community to grow. Because He is the Living Stone, believers who come to Him become “living stones” in Him.

## 3. Rejected by men, chosen by God

“Disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious.”

- a) “Disallowed indeed of men” – a stone that was rejected as being useful and then thrown away and destroyed. That’s what happened at the crucifixion.

Psalm 118:22

<sup>22</sup> The stone *which* the builders refused is become the head *stone* of the corner.

- b) “But chosen of God” – rejected of man but accepted for the payment of the sins of mankind by the Father.

Matthew 12:18

<sup>18</sup> Behold my servant, whom I have chosen; my beloved, in whom my soul is well pleased: I will put my spirit upon him, and he shall shew judgment to the Gentiles.

### Isaiah 42:1

<sup>1</sup> Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, *in whom* my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles.

#### c) "Precious" (to God)

The word translated "precious" in verse 4 (ἐντιμος) is a term meaning "highly honored" or "held in great esteem." It does not describe intrinsic worth, as in 1:19 when Peter speaks of Christ's precious blood, but rather the value God Himself assigns to His chosen cornerstone. Men rejected Him, but God honored Him. And in verse 7 Peter uses a different word, τιμή, to say that believers now share God's valuation of Christ – He is precious to God first, and therefore precious to us.

## B. Our identity (individually) as living stones (vs. 5a)

"Ye also, as lively stones..."

Because we come to the Living Stone, His life flows into us. We become what He is – living, chosen, placed by God.

- Think about this: a stone has no say in where it is put – it does not choose its place in the structure. The master builder sets it where it best serves His design. God does the same with us.

## C. Our formation into God's spiritual house (vs. 5b)

"Are built up" (οικοδομεῖσθε) is a passive verb indicating that we are being built. This is a work accomplished in us (passive) by God. It's not something we do.

Nor are we meant to be solitary "stones" scattered in the world. We are fitted together for a purpose.



This is a description of the Church as it is constituted by individual believers relating to Christ. Just as one brick is not a wall, one believer is not a spiritual house.

The imagery is seen in other passages: 1 Cor. 3:9-17; Eph. 2:20-22.

#### Ephesians 2:20-22

<sup>20</sup> And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; <sup>21</sup> In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: <sup>22</sup> In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.

### D. Our calling as a holy priesthood (vs. 5c)

This flows from our being built together:

1. "An holy priesthood" – in the Old Testament, you had a priesthood; in the New Testament, *we are* a priesthood. Every believer has direct access to the Holy of Holies.
  2. "To offer up spiritual sacrifices" – these are not animal sacrifices but: praise (Heb. 13:15); doing good and giving (Heb. 13:16); ourselves (Rom. 12:1); obedience (Phil. 4:18); and prayer (Rev. 5:8).
  3. "Acceptable to God by Jesus Christ" – the whole point of this new "spiritual house" (the church) is worship and witness.
- Peter will expand on this identity further in verses 6-10, showing from the Old Testament why Christ is the chosen cornerstone and why believers are now God's covenant people.

Conclusion:

The question is, "Are we fit stones for God's spiritual house?"

Keep in mind, He doesn't use unprepared stones. He shapes us by:

- Removing relational sins (vs. 1)
- Stirring up spiritual appetite (vs. 2)
- Reminding us of His grace (vs. 3)
- Calling us continually to Christ (vs. 4-5)

As we submit ourselves to this preparation, He sets into place – a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices that please Him.

Ask yourself:

- Am I laying aside attitudes that fracture the fellowship?
- Do I crave the Word with the urgency of a newborn for milk?
- Have I forgotten the sweetness of God's grace?
- Am I continually coming to Christ so He may shape me?
- Am I offering my life as a spiritual sacrifice to God?