

# *Truth for Today*

## *The Bible Explained*

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## **Peter's First Epistle**

### **1 Peter 2:1-25**

If you are a regular listener to Truth for Today you will know that two weeks ago we began a new series looking at Peter and his first epistle. The first talk in the series was an introduction to Peter and his first epistle, looking also at the Gospels and the Acts. Last week's talk was on 1 Peter chapter 1, so we will continue the series today by looking at chapter 2.

Although chapters and verses are helpful for us to find our way in our Bibles, they are not inspired and sometimes if we stick strictly to them we lose the context of what the Scriptures are saying. Chapter 2 begins with *Wherefore*, chapter 3 begins with *Likewise*, and chapter 4 begins with *Forasmuch*, so you can see how these chapters must be read together if we are to understand what the apostle Peter is saying.

Last week we read, *Be ye holy, for I am holy* and Peter reminds his readers that their redemption had been paid for in the blood of Christ. They were born again, and as a consequence their lives should be changed. The first 3 verses of our chapter therefore describe what we could call, normal Christianity. *Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, as newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby: if so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious.*

We could spend time today going through these verses, challenging our hearts as to how many of those things, which should be laid aside, still find a place in our lives. It would do us good, but I will leave that for your private consideration. Peter simply states what should be normal Christianity, and moves on. The believers to whom Peter was writing were mainly converted Jews (see ch. 1 v. 1), and would know the Old Testament Scriptures. He speaks of their desire for the milk of the word, and quotes from Psalm 34 v. 8, *O taste and see that the LORD is good*. The challenge for them in their day, and for us today is, are we feeding on the Word of God, and tasting (or experiencing for ourselves) the Lord's goodness? Our lives should be different from those around us who have no personal experience of the Lord's grace.

Peter then speaks of Christ as a living stone, and of the believers as lively (or living) stones being built together as a spiritual house. He then brings before his readers the truth that every believer is a priest, speaking of the holy priesthood and the royal priesthood. Now these things will need some explaining, and I intend to focus my talk today on verses 4-10 of our chapter. If time permits, we will also comment on the last few verses from verse 21-25.

In verse 4 it is important to see that the living stone is Christ Himself. Peter says, *To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious*. The living stones are the believers of this dispensation, (by this I mean all who have believed on the Son of God from the day of Pentecost (see Acts ch. 2) until the moment when Christ will return to take all Christians to heaven, which we believe is imminent. Verse 5 reads, *Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house....* So we learn that the church is a spiritual house,

composed of every true believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, as living stones built together for an habitation of God through the Spirit (see Ephesians ch. 2 v. 22).

Peter never forgot the words Jesus spoke to him in Matthew ch. 16 vv. 16-18. In reply to the Lord's question to His disciples, *But whom say ye that I am?*, Peter answered, *Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God*. It is worthwhile saying that this was not popular opinion at this time. The Jewish religious leaders and the people had rejected Jesus as the Messiah, the Christ. We read in John's Gospel, *He [that is Jesus, the Son of God] came unto his own, and his own received him not* (see John ch. 1 v. 11). But the words Peter spoke, Jesus said were by revelation from the Father. Jesus then said, *And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell [or hades] shall not prevail against it*. Peter would never forget these wonderful words!

Here for the very first time we learn that the Lord Jesus would build His church. The church was not part of the Old Testament revelation. Although it was always in the mind of God, it was hidden from the Old Testament prophets. In Ephesians Paul writes of this mystery, the church, which by revelation from God he was making known. Read the first 3 chapters and see that the church was in the will of God (ch. 1), and would be formed by the work of God (ch. 2), and would display the wisdom of God (ch. 3). This church, His church, would be built upon Christ Himself, *the Son of the living God*, and not upon Peter as many would have us believe. The Lord had changed Simon's name to Peter (meaning a small stone), as if to emphasise that He was the rock, not Peter. In 1 Corinthians ch. 3 vv. 9-11, Paul speaking of himself as a wise masterbuilder, building up the church of God, says, *For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ*. We can say then on the authority of Scripture that the rock on which the church is built is Christ and none other!

Christ is the living stone, as we read in verse 4 of our chapter, *disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious*. He was the stone which was rejected by the builders. We first read this in Psalm 118 vv. 22-26, and the Lord Jesus quotes these words after giving the parable of the vineyard, to convict the chief priests and Pharisees that they (the builders) had rejected Him (the stone) (see Matthew ch. 21 v. 42; Mark 12 v. 10; Luke ch. 20 v. 17). In Acts ch. 4 v. 11, Peter quotes the same Scripture in his preaching to the Jewish leaders, the Sanhedrin, and speaking of Jesus of Nazareth said, *This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner*. Rejected and disallowed by Israel, because He did not fit into their plans, but our Lord Jesus Christ is chosen of God, and precious. I trust He is precious to you. I love the hymn which begins,

Father, how precious unto Thee  
Is Thy beloved Son,  
In whom Thou dost perfection see,  
Thy holy, blessed One!

And ends,

He, preciousness itself to Thee,  
To us is precious too;  
We every beauty in Him see,  
And Thine own glory view.

(Author Anon)

In our increasingly godless society, let us as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ desire an increased knowledge of the worth of the One whom God has chosen, and who is all precious to Him.

Then Peter says that the believers to whom he is writing are living stones, and are built up into a spiritual house. It is interesting to see the different ways the church is described in the New Testament, as the body of Christ (see 1 Corinthians ch. 12 v. 27); as the bride and wife of the Lamb (see Revelation ch. 19 vv. 7-8, ch. 21 v. 9); and as the building, an habitation of God through the Spirit (see Ephesians ch. 2 v. 22). In passing it is worth noting that Paul speaks most about the body, John about the bride, and Peter about the building. Wonderful how these men wrote under the control of the Holy Spirit so that we might have a full revelation of the will, work and wisdom of God.

The Jews were accustomed to having a building as a dwelling place for God. God had given Moses the pattern for the construction of the Tabernacle in the wilderness, and King Solomon, David's son, had built the Temple in Jerusalem. Although partially destroyed, it had been rebuilt in the days of Nehemiah. The Lord and His disciples had mingled in its courts and outer buildings, but as the Lord was of the tribe of Judah, He would not have been permitted to enter the Temple itself. This temple would shortly be destroyed by the Romans under Titus in 70 AD, but the church, the habitation of God through the Spirit, would be a building of a completely different character altogether. Constructed by the Holy Spirit, each believer as a living stone would be built into this spiritual house in which God would dwell. Twice over in the Acts we read that God does not dwell in man-made temples (see Acts ch. 7 v. 48, & ch. 17 v. 24).

The foundation of this spiritual building is Christ Himself. As the chief corner stone He gives foundation and character to the building. Note the contrast, Christ was rejected by Israel and cast aside as worthless by the Jewish leaders, but chosen of God and precious. Christ is indispensable to the church of God! Strange then when we read in Revelation chapter 3 concerning the church at Laodicea that Christ is seen as outside the door, knocking. I believe this is a word for the professing church today at the close of this day of grace. The Lord desires fellowship with those who hear His voice and open to Him. How precious is His promise, *For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them* (see Matthew ch. 18 v. 20).

Having established that the church is a spiritual building which we as believers are part of, and not a physical building which we can enter and then leave, we need to consider our conduct. Paul writing to his young son in the faith, Timothy, gives him instruction as to his behaviour in *the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth* (see 1 Timothy ch. 3 v. 15). The words of Psalm 93 are still applicable to the house of God in our day, *Holiness becometh thine house, O LORD, for ever*. Not surprisingly, we find in the New Testament epistles that God has house rules which must govern His church, and His judgement begins there (see 1 Peter ch. 4 v. 17). The apostles and New Testament prophets built upon the foundation of Christ, and we are warned to be careful how we build, and what we build, into the church. Paul speaks in an illustrative way of gold, silver and precious stones which are valuable and will have eternal reward, but also of wood, hay and stubble which will be burned up. Read what he says in 1 Corinthians ch. 3 vv. 9-23, and be warned that if you are not building what God deems to be valuable into the church, your efforts will be in vain.

Peter also speaks about the church, as living stones, being an holy priesthood (v. 5) and a royal priesthood (v. 9). The Jewish Christians to whom he was writing knew very well about the Old Testament priesthood. The priesthood was given to Aaron and to his sons, and only those of the tribe of Levi were permitted to be priests. It didn't matter how good or how gifted you were, if you were not a Levite then you could not be a priest. But Peter is now telling these Christian believers, who are addressed as newborn babes, that they are a holy priesthood and a royal priesthood. This is amazing! Here we find a most wonderful truth of our times, the truth that every believer in the Lord Jesus Christ is a priest, able to worship God and serve man.

I am very aware that much of what I am saying today may be quite foreign to some of our listeners. Many Christians will be accustomed to a church experience which has a distinct separation between clergy and laity. Those who are appointed or ordained who take the lead and those who make up the congregation. These leaders may have different titles in different denominations, but essentially there are two groups, the priests and the people. But this is not what we find in these verses in 1 Peter ch. 2. There is no ordination required, or qualifications to be gained to become a priest, for that is what Peter says you are if you are a believer on the Lord Jesus Christ. So we need to explore this truth a little further if we are to understand what the Holy Spirit is saying to the church, through Peter.

We have already noted in our talk that Peter speaks of this priesthood of all believers in two ways. He first speaks of holy priests and then of royal priests. I think this order is very important and shows us that our first responsibility and privilege, as holy priests, is the worship of God, *to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ*. It has often been noted that in John's Gospel, the Lord speaks to the leader of the Jews, Nicodemus about the necessity of being born again, and to a sinful Samaritan woman about the privilege of worship. Look closely at the Lord's words in ch. 4 v. 23, where He says that *the Father seeketh such to worship him*. Worship was not to be reserved to the very good, or the gifted, or the high born, etc. No, the Father was seeking sinners saved by grace, to worship Him. In John ch. 4 the fountain of water (which doubtless speaks of the Spirit of God indwelling the believer) **springs up** to God, but when we come to ch. 7, we read that the rivers of living water **flow out** from the believer to man. Here then is the same order which Peter gives us in relation to our privilege and responsibility as priests. Service upward to God in worship as holy priests, then service outward to man in good works as royal priests.

Just as the house is a spiritual concept, composed of living stones, the service of the holy priest, in the worship of the Father is in *spirit and in truth*. We need to be careful about what physical and natural things we introduce into our worship of God. Much of what we see today in organised Christianity is a throwback to Old Testament days when the material things were so important. The Lord speaks of *true worship*, not that Jewish worship was false, for it was ordained by God, but we must understand that the physical, material things associated with the worship of God in the Old Testament were but shadows of that which would come in the Christian era. I can appreciate that perhaps for some listening today, it is not easy to comprehend what I am saying, that what we have today in true Christian worship, in spirit and truth, is superior to what the Israelites had in the days of their magnificent Temple and all the furniture and vessels of the sanctuary. The New Testament (perhaps especially the epistle of Hebrews) explains that the sacrifices, offerings and feasts etc. in the Old Testament only had value in that they spoke of the person and work of Christ, whose coming would put an end to this system of material worship.

Now what about the royal priesthood? If we read on in the chapter from verse 9-19, we will see that Peter begins by describing the believers in the Lord Jesus Christ as *a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light*. These verses certainly include Gentile believers as well as those Jews who had converted to Christianity. Surely we can identify with verse 10, *Which in times past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy*. What a responsibility we have to show forth the praises of Him who hath called us out of darkness into His marvellous light, and to bear witness and testimony of the mercy and grace which we have received. If you are a believer on the Lord Jesus Christ, then you are called to this royal priesthood, we are all servants of God.

Looking at the verses in our chapter, I judge that our testimony towards man is as much about what we do as what we say. Peter speaks about abstaining from fleshly lusts, doing good works, and our general conduct as a witness to the unbeliever. It may be, he says in verse 20, that the time will come when as Christians we will suffer for doing that which is right. God is honoured and

a testimony is rendered to man if we bear this suffering with patience. I wonder how we react if we feel that we are being punished in some way for being a Christian? As royal priests, what we do must measure up to what we say!

When Paul writes to the Christians at Corinth he says that they were to act as ambassadors of Christ. Likewise, our concern should be to represent Christ in this increasingly godless world, declaring His goodness and being diligent in persuading men of their need of salvation. We may never be ambassadors for the Queen or the government overseas, but as Christians we all are ambassadors for Christ, just where He has placed us. Perhaps like me you sang in Sunday school, *Jesus bids us shine... you in your small corner and I in mine.*

Our time is almost gone, but I did want to say just a few words about the verses at the end of our chapter. There was a time when Peter said to the Lord, *Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord* (see Luke ch. 5 v. 8). Here he is speaking of one, our Lord Jesus Christ who *did no sin*. The sufferings and death which the Lord endured at the cross of Calvary was not for His own sins, for He had none. He was the sinless one! I know that some teach that although the Lord did not sin that He could have sinned. Well the Scriptures are very clear about that. He could not sin as He did not possess the sinful nature, that you and I possess as inherited from Adam. The Lord Jesus Christ was born of the virgin and did not possess the fallen humanity of Adam's race. He was a true Man, yes, but a perfect Man! And that is the reason why He was able (or competent) to *bare our sins in His own body on the tree.*

It is worth noting that the Holy Spirit uses the apostles Paul, John and Peter to give us a three-fold witness in relation to the Lord's sinless humanity. Paul says of Christ, *He knew no sin* (see 2 Corinthians ch. 5 v. 21); John says, *In him is no sin* (see 1 John ch. 3 v. 5); and Peter says, *Who did no sin* (see 1 Peter ch. 2 v. 22). How careful the Scriptures are to emphasise this foundational truth.

And finally, the One who died for us, bearing away our sins, is the One who cares for us day by day. He is the Shepherd and Bishop (or overseer) of our souls. Peter will return to this wonderful theme in chapter 5 where he says, *Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.* What a lovely way to end our time today!

May God bless you all.

Thank you for listening to this Truth for Today talk on Peter's First Epistle chapter 2. Talk no. T1099

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