

July 22, 2014/1 Peter 2:1-10 (ESV¹)

1Pe 2:1 So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander.

1Peter 2 begins "So/therefore." It's not absolutely clear, but most probably this refers back to **1:22** and Peter's declaration that Christians are to love each other. In what specific ways does real love manifest itself among Christians? For one thing, we put aside attitudes and actions that are harmful to others. The verb translated "put away" is literally to peel off as one would peel off a soiled garment. "all malice" is broader than just ill will. It is not only ill intent but any actions that might be harmful to others. The four that follow are but examples of what needs to be peeled off,

1. *deceit* is to harm another through trickery or falsehood,
2. *hypocrisy* is hiding inward evil with an outward show of righteousness,
3. *envy* (... we all know this fellow ...) it is the opposite of being glad and thankful for the good that comes to others, and
4. *slander* ... any kind of speech that harms or is intended to harm another.

All of these sins are contrary to Christian love. In the light of God's great salvation Peter says, be done with these and all other malice/wickedness.

1Pe 2:2 Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation--

There's no new sentence here in the Greek. The sense of the command here is more like "Therefore, putting aside ... long for ..." Do this "Like newborn babies." Peter, in **1:23** has said that Christians start life over, they are born again. He seems to carry this idea on here. We're born again and then need to be nourished just as newborns need to be nourished. The correct English translation of the word "spiritual" is not clear. Many believe that the alternate translation "of the Word" (i.e. of the Scriptures) is better. (That's the KJV translation.) Regardless, it's pretty clear that the reference is to God's Word. (From the proximity of verse 23, the way that the Old Testament talks about God's Word as pure and nourishing, etc.) We're to crave it. That's an intense personal desire, not just some attitude of indifference. It's pure/unadulterated, not mixed with anything. Note that the metaphor here isn't the one of Hebrews, where milk is for kids. This milk is not just meant for beginners, it's meant to nourish every believer at every station. The application is not limited to newborn Christians, but for all, the craving is to be like that of a newborn.

1Pe 2:3 if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.

"tasted" means to have come to know by personal experience. We come to know and taste the Lord through the Word of God. It's also through the Word that we will grow up in salvation.

Psa 34:8 Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!

Peter now starts to talk about membership in God's family, and shows carefully that the Christian church is now the true Israel, God's chosen people.

1Pe 2:4 As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious,

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1Pe 2:5 you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

The relationship between verses 4 and 5 is that coming and being built happen simultaneously. What is perhaps not completely clear from our English renderings is the continuous nature of the coming ... the gist here is something like "As you continually come to Christ (in initial faith and then in worship and prayer) you are yourselves being built into a spiritual house."

It is "As you come to Him the living Stone." Christ is the stone with a capital "S." He is living. He is both alive and giving life. Christ is superior to the lifeless stones used to build the Old Testament temple.

He was "rejected by men." These were Jesus' own words in **Matt 21:42**, which quotes **Psalm 118:22-23**. Jesus, rejected by the Jewish religious leaders of the day, becomes the chief personality in what God is building, namely the church. And the amazing thing is that we ordinary people who embrace Christ then too become part of what God is building. Christ is the Stone with a capital "S," but we too are stones, being built up/growing into a spiritual house. The "spiritual" doesn't mean "immaterial," but rather in accord with God's desires/influenced by the Holy Spirit. The picture is the church as a house for God, taking the place of the Old Testament tabernacle or temple. God doesn't dwell in such buildings. He lives in and among His people. The Old Testament records the glory of the LORD descending to fill Solomon's temple. Peter was there at the day of Pentecost to see the glory of the LORD descend to rest in and on His church. It's interesting that Peter, who Jesus named "the rock," makes it clear that we're all stones. There's no hint here that this is something reserved for him personally or even for a subset of the church.

There are a number of things the metaphors of stones and house teach. A stone is no good alone. It must be fit together with others to amount to anything. A house has a builder, is built according to a plan, is a permanent structure, provides safety and shelter, is a single unit constructed of a variety of parts, etc. But while this is all good and helpful, we shouldn't see the image as a static thing, without life. It is alive and growing. In fact Peter switches images in the middle of the verse to use a priesthood to describe the Christian community.

Peter quotes from Exodus, again applying the Old Testament terms for Israel to the Christian church.

Exo 19:3 while Moses went up to God. The LORD called to him out of the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the people of Israel:

Exo 19:4 You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself.

Exo 19:5 Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine;

Exo 19:6 and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel."

The Old Testament priests had direct access to God and their function was to bring others to God. The Old Testament priests were to bring sacrifices to God. The church has access to God in Christ and it is its function to bring men and women to God. And Peter goes on to explain that it is the function of the

church to offer not the Old Testament animal sacrifices, but spiritual sacrifices. These include

1. our bodies/whole selves **Romans 12:1**,
2. money or material goods **Philippians 4:18** and **Hebrews 13:16**,
3. praise to God **Hebrews 13:15**, and
4. doing good **Hebrews 13:16**.

In fact, all we do ought to be seen in this light.

The purpose of these sacrifices is different from the Old Testament sacrifices. It is not to gain favor or right standing with God. That is already ours through faith in Christ. The point is rather an expression of profound gratitude. And these sacrifices are acceptable to God *through Christ Jesus*. Every (false) human religion pins its hopes on our own works and is always aware of our guilt and the impossibility of works doing the job. The sacrifices offered by humans can never really clear us, but the case is different in Christ.

Peter now refers to the Old Testament texts about stones and applies them to Christ.

1Pe 2:6 For it stands in Scripture: "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame."

This is a quote from **Isaiah 28:16**. The context there is that the princes of Judah are congratulating themselves on their political cleverness and think that it will preserve them and the nation. God says that the cornerstone He's laying in Zion is going to provide a foundation for the only edifice that will stand in the time of trial. That chief cornerstone, says Peter, is Christ and the building is His church.

1Pe 2:7 So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,"

The first phrase is apparently hard to render. Literally it is something like "therefore the honor to you the believers." The ESV is pretty good. It might also be translated "to you therefore who believe is honor." To those who believe there is honor, not the shame. The Isaiah quote in verse 6 says that the Father sees the Son as the precious cornerstone. Good to those who see it His way. There are but two reactions to Jesus, trust that issues in honor and disbelief that issues in shame.

Peter quotes **Psalms 118:22** regarding what the ESV calls the "cornerstone." It is literally "head of the corner." The "head" can mean "at the furthest extremity" which is where the cornerstone stood, lining out the location, elevation and orientation of the building. Peter has no trouble applying that description to Jesus, just as He Himself did in **Matt 21:42**.

Peter now goes to **Isaiah 8:14**.

Isa 8:13 But the LORD of hosts, him you shall honor as holy. Let him be your fear, and let him be your dread.

Isa 8:14 And he will become a sanctuary and a stone of offense and a rock of stumbling to both houses of Israel, a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

Isa 8:15 And many shall stumble on it. They shall fall and be broken; they shall be snared and taken."

That is, Peter says that the LORD God of Isaiah is Jesus, the stone that will make men stumble.

1Pe 2:8 and "A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense." They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.

To stumble is to take offense at and reject. Earlier Peter has said that it is the Christian Gospel that gives those who believe new life. There will be those, who when they hear the Gospel, will fall over it. It is meant to bring us to life, but if we reject it, that brings an implied judgment. Note that the taking offense at and rejecting the Gospel is linked with disobedience to the Word. People almost always fail to embrace the Gospel because of their morality. They do not wish to repent of sin and thus reject the Good News. Their theology follows their (lack of) morality. They are unwilling to take God at His word and obey.

The phrase "as they were destined to do" is what it is and says what it says. Arminians need to hear it say what it says. Calvinists need to bear in mind that the text leaves open the possibility of later repentance and saving faith. It could be rendered literally as "presently" not believing, stumbling and disobeying. And Peter goes on to affirm the hope that many of these unbelievers will come to faith (see **2:12, 3:1, 3:15, 2Peter 3:9**). The main emphasis here in any case is the destining of the saints for good. That is Peter's main concern and emphasis. Those who believe have a wonderful calling.

1Pe 2:9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Remember that verse 5 quotes Exodus 19 and applies the term "holy priesthood." Calvin said, "The meaning then is, as though he had said 'Moses formerly called your fathers a holy nation, a priestly kingdom, and God's peculiar people: all these titles do now far more justly belong to you; therefore you ought to beware lest your unbelief should rob you of them.'" In contrast to those who stumbled, you are a chosen race.

The description in this verse of God's people is packed full. Every phrase in it is a rich one.

Christians are a "chosen race," filling the place of Old Testament Israel in God's plans. It's His doing and for His glory. The Christian is chosen by God for the privilege of fellowship, obedience and service, not by physical descent, but by rebirth into God's family.

Christians are a "royal priesthood, a holy nation." Again, these are quotes from **Exodus 19:6**. Verse 5 says "holy priesthood," and the quote in Exodus says "kingdom of priests." This wording is slightly different and attributes royalty to the whole of the priesthood/church. In the Old Testament, the kingship and priesthood were united only in Mechizidek and potentially in the Messiah. Now they are united in fact in Christ and His church.

Christians are "a holy nation." God is holy, so ought His people be holy. His people are a nation. That's quite a thought when we consider that living in nearly every nation of the world are members of this invisible holy nation of God. We have various languages, appearances, customs, etc. and are all part of the Christian church. We are not people identified because we live in one location, but because we are subjects of one King and servants of one Lord, set apart to God.

Christians are "a people for His own possession," a people for God to specially possess. Things take on special value according to who owns or has owned them. We go to museums to look at ordinary household items that were used by George Washington or King Tut. We're like that. We're a people of worth in that we belong to God.

Christians are these things "that you (they) may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you." God is the very definition of excellence. We are to reflect that and sound that abroad. We are to declare the perfection of His being in word and in action. As the catechism says "The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him eternally." We are redeemed not simply for our pleasure, but that we might bring Him glory. Salvation is ultimately not man-centered, but rather God-centered.

God is the One "who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." The Christian faith is something that is out in the open, above board. There is no secret handshake or special words only for the insiders. It is light and life and wholeness and sanity. Truly, outside of the Christian message all is darkness, despair, distrust and fear. Christians are called into HIS wonderful light. The good proceeds wholly from God. It is His, given graciously to undeserving sinners such as you and me.

1Pe 2:10 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.

Peter makes another Old Testament reference, this time to the famous phrases in **Hosea (1:6, 9; 2:1, 23)**. Christians had at one time, like rebellious and wayward Israel been rejected by God for their sin, had been no people, and had received no mercy. We were condemned for sin. But now we have been granted the highest privilege in the universe, to be God's people. This is not by any merit of our own, but only by the undeserved favor of God. We have received mercy. Praise be to Christ!