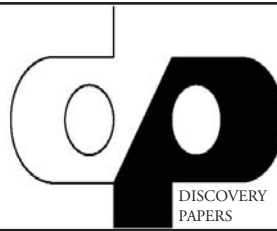


# A PEOPLE BELONGING TO GOD

*SERIES: BELOVED EXILES: STUDIES IN 1 PETER*



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3rd Message  
1 Peter 2:1-10  
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We've come to the second chapter of the book of 1 Peter and find two metaphors that will guide what we learn. One is a baby, the other a building. Both are familiar across time and geography. In every setting newborn babies are insistent about nourishment. All civilizations mark themselves by architecture – their tallest buildings indicate what they worship. A nursing child and a temple being constructed are the images before us.

1 Peter 2:1-2:

**Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation.**

Let me stop for a point of translation. “Pure spiritual milk,” as the NIV has it, is probably better translated “the pure milk of the word.” The nourishment that we need comes from the Word of God. In the book of Hebrews, milk is a symbol for the first lessons of faith as contrasted with meat, instruction for those who are mature. In our text here, milk is used for God’s word in its entirety.

Verses 2-10:

**Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good. As you come to him, the living Stone-rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him- you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For in Scripture it says: “See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame. “Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, “The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone,” and, “A stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.” They stumble because they disobey the message- which is also what they were destined for. But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are**

**the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.**

The big idea of verse two is easy to understand. Babies are born hungry, with an instinct to nurse, and the very best food for them is their mother’s milk. Expecting to mature in the Lord, we should long for that food which will make us grow. The Word of God, its message of forgiveness and power and purpose, is our food. However, most of us would admit, if we are honest, do not always hunger for the Word of God. We know the cycle of starting and stopping a program of regular bible reading. Why does Scripture too often seem irrelevant, unable to compete with simplistic entertainment or distracting activities?

Let’s observe first that the Bible is not always easy to understand. It generally requires attention and thoughtfulness, and simple laziness may be part of the problem. It may be, in addition, that we’ve been taught badly and been turned off by boring or self-serving preaching and teaching. Sometimes Scripture is treated as a book for scholars alone, though in fact the wonder and beauty of the biblical message will always break out of any attempt to mute or restrict it.

Whatever the reason for loss of interest in Scripture, the insights of verses 1 and 3 will help us regain a hunger for the pure milk of the Word. We need to say no to alternatives, to “rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander” (v.1) and to taste the goodness of the Lord (v.3). We cannot defend lies, hypocrisy, and a willingness to hurt others, to cling to a world that revolves around us, and then hope that God’s truth will interest us. Nor will we hunger for great truth if the book is just a book – our hearts must be penetrated, tasting the loving goodness of God.

What do we need to give up? Malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, slander. These are terms that all come from a way of life that comes naturally to everyone. Sinful humanity is competitive by nature. In order for me (or my tribe) to win, others must lose. In ways both subtle and overt we find deceit comes easy and misuse of others is normal.

Malice is an interesting word; it means intimidating anger. A lot of people win the competition by being intimidating. Bullies may well end up on top, at least for a time. But if we are malicious people, if we are committed to winning by intimidation, we will never hunger for the Word of God. The terms guile and hypocrisy describe a different competitive strategy - the way of back-stabbers,

not bullies. Envy and slander often grip the lives of those who feel they have been given the short end of the stick.

Silicon Valley is, perhaps, the most difficult place in the world to raise children or do business without worshipping at the altar of competition, but difficult is not impossible. Peter calls on us to repent of essential self-centeredness in order to hunger for greater truth.

So when we come to the Word of God, hungry for its message and wanting to be nourished by its truths, what do we find? We find the embrace of the Lord. We find that even His corrections are for our good.

What will give us a heart or a passion for the Word of God? We know that in its pages are His kindness and goodness and grace. Anger and deception require time and attention, grudges need nursing, envy expands to fill our thoughts, and intimidation requires vigilance. But the Truth builds us up. It expands new vistas, it creates connections, it opens doors to adventure, dispels the darkness, unbinds enthusiasm. We've tasted the tenderness, renewal, and forgiveness of the Lord and therefore hunger for what will truly nourish us.

The second metaphor Peter uses is that of a temple. In every culture, including ours, important buildings mark what is believed about God. In the case of Israel at the time of Jesus, worship of the living God was supplanted by attention to the human builders and priestly attendants of the temple on Mt. Zion. Israel valued its religious activities more than the One they were intended to honor. God's Son was rejected in the holy place which had become a den of robbers.

1 Peter 2:4-6:

**As you come to him, the living Stone-rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him- you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For in Scripture it says, "See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame."**

The building in Jerusalem had failed and a new sort of building for God emerges. A "living stone" is an oxymoron. We are familiar with gravestones and phrases like stone-cold-dead. The phrase living stone seems self-canceling. And this arresting metaphor signals that the familiar world has changed.

The new temple is built on a living foundation, on Jesus Christ. We are new creatures in Christ, alive in Him and fitted together (each saint reinforcing the contribution

of others). Christians in vital fellowship are the place of God's presence, not a geographical location or impressive structure. A catacomb serves as well as a cathedral. When the people of God are gathered for His sake, building one another up, singing His praise, feeding on His Truth, spiritual sacrifices are offered and He is honored.

The redemptive work of God will always be opposed. Alive from the dead, Jesus, the living stone, is precious to God, and it is precious to us who believe. But some find this message contemptible. He is scorned when the gospel is preached in the same way he was rejected and crucified as a failed Messiah.

Verses 7-8:

**Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, "The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone," and, "A stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall." They stumble because they disobey the message-which is also what they were destined for.**

We stumble when we are attentive to the wrong things. This text denounces 'religion' undertaken to call attention to the people who practice it; organizations, fund-raising, and structures which exalt human beings.

The new Cowboy Stadium opened this fall. It cost 1.2 billion dollars to build. People in Texas sometimes refer to it as Jerry's World, in honor of the ego of team owner Jerry Jones. It lacks nothing in state of the art amenities, technology, and transportation. Some part of each of us envies those who boast of grand accomplishments. But such boastfulness makes us stumble and keeps us from being joined to the people of God.

Verses nine and ten end this section, and we see the apostle use more images from Israel's history to instruct followers of Christ.

Verses 9-10:

**But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.**

Once nobodies, lost in darkness, we have been granted enormous privileges. Chiefly these are worship and witness – offering God praise and speaking so those still in the darkness may hear a word of hope.

We will hunger for the meal that nourishes, the great truths of the Word of God, if we have seen the emptiness of self promotion and tasted the goodness of the Lord. The temple in which God is worshipped is the one made of living stones, not a tower erected by the proud.

So we pray:

Thank you, Lord, for helping us clear away cobwebs and reminding us of what isn't important. Grant us a deep hunger for what is really nourishing. Help us believe that You live among us, that our worship is honoring to You. Give us the insight to give away what we have been given. Amen

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