

Study 3: 1st Peter Chapter 2

Introduction

In the previous section, Peter discussed the application of practical living, and the *need* to live our lives as christians as examples to others. This theme continues through chapter 2. We need to show respect to others, as well as looking to Jesus as the great and perfect example.

Body of the Study

Growing as Christians

Jesus the Rock

Putting things into Practice

Christ as our Example

Homework and preparation for next week:

Read the notes as a review of the study

Read chapter 3 in preparation for the next study

In verse 11, Peter repeats the theme of being pilgrims and sojourners. How could the descriptions of verse 9 cause a person to become alienated from the world?

Look at your own life in view of the characteristics that Peter calls for in this chapter. What areas do you need to improve and work on?

How are you growing towards maturity as a christian? Look back at the progress that you have made over the last year, and the last few years. Do you see areas of growth? What other areas can you work on that will help you to improve further?

Notes for study 3: 1st Peter Chapter 2

In the previous section, Peter discussed the application of practical living, and the *need* to live our lives as christians as examples to others. This theme continues through chapter 2. We need to show respect to others, as well as looking to Jesus as the great and perfect example.

Growing as Christians

Peter builds on the previous arguments, and connects the thought train by using the word bridge “therefore”. He is getting down to the practicalities of christian living, which starts with christian growth “... *Therefore, laying aside all malice, all guile, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby...*” (1:2:1-2 NKJV). The first part of the process of growth is to tear away our old habits – especially our worldly (fleshly) habits. He uses the term *laying aside* which has the idea of stripping them off like clothing and putting them aside.

Malice is the first one of these that Peter mentions, which has the idea of “badness in quality” or “the vicious character generally” (Vines¹). We often see this carried out in our society where some people will carry out violent and *malicious* crimes for no apparent reason at all.

Guile is the second, which has the idea of “a bait, snare, deceit, and subtlety” (Vines¹). The idea is setting a trap to try to catch people out – and is the very thing that the Jews tried to do to Jesus.

Hypocrisy is the third, which is when we say one thing, but then go and do the very thing we denounce by our words.

Envy is the fourth, which has the idea of wanting to have something (or be in a position) that someone else has, but we don’t.

Evil Speaking is the last of the things that Peter mentions.

We can see what must have been happening with these brethren, as they went around bring vicious attacks against their accusers, and were trying to deceive them with subtlety, and catch them out. They were saying one thing, but then doing the very opposite in an attempt to catch their enemies out by deception. They were envious of the position that others had, and in the face of persecution, they may well have been envious of those who had food when they themselves were dying of starvation. In addition, they were saying evil things about the people who were affecting them, which probably didn’t help to calm the situation. This is contrary to how we ought to behave as christians, and further into the chapter, Peter gets down to dealing with this situation in more detail.

In direct contrast to this situation, we need to be like babies. We need to be fed on pure milk – *the pure milk of the word* – so that we can gain strength and grow as christians. However, we need to recognise that once past the baby stage, we need strong meat to grow. The Hebrew writer criticises his readers because they haven’t got past the milk stage (Heb 5:11-14). The idea here is the purity of the word, compared to the corrupt practices that must have been going on.

Peter closes the sentence with “...*if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious...*” (1:2:3 NKJV). This is an if-then-else type statement, **IF** you belong to Christ, **THEN** behave the way christians should, **ELSE** why do you behave hypocritically. He almost draws a noose around the readers – *of course* they believe that the Lord is gracious, and have seen (tasted) that grace – so therefore we need to behave appropriately.

Jesus the Rock

Peter puts up a play on words here. He portrays Jesus as a rock (as the OT writers also portrayed Him), and the christians as living stones – smaller versions of the larger rock. We should have the

¹ Vines W.E. “An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words” Fleming H. Revell Company, Old Tappan, New Jersey

same characteristics of the rock, and the very same things that were happening to the Christians in the face of their trials were the very things that had happened to Christ. "... *Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house...*" (1:2:4-5 NKJV). He is about to show that the prophets spoke about Jesus' rejection. There is a strong sense of identity between the trials the brethren were facing, and Jesus' treatment. In spite of the treatment that Jesus received, there was never any doubt on His part, or on God's part of the special place that He held.

In exactly the same way, "... *you also as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ...*" (1:2:5 NKJV). As *living stones*, the brethren were feeling downtrodden because of *their rejection by men*; yet that is just how Jesus felt. In spite of their situation, they need to remember that they were God's people and in a privileged position.

Peter builds a strong sense of the Temple worship here (which suggests that he might have Jewish brethren in mind). To the Jews, the Temple worship and all of the things that went with it held special significance. It was the focus of their worship, with the synagogues only forming a secondary function. It was the dwelling place of God (the place where the Shekinah – God's presence – was. See the special study on the Shekinah at the end of Acts chapter 7). The Jews were required to come to Jerusalem to worship in the Temple on the three pilgrim feasts every year (and if not every year, then at least once in their lifetime). The priests served in the Temple, assisted by the Levites. They did no other work, and were supported by eating the sacrificed food, and by the tithing of the people. So, the picture that Peter builds of *a spiritual house* brings about a picture of the Temple. Rather than the physical Temple which was made of stone, Christians are *living stones*! Indeed, rather than observing the privileged priests offering the sacrifices, we are *a holy priesthood*, and we are the ones who *offer up the sacrifices* to the Lord. The sacrifices that we offer are not the lambs, goats, and bulls, but rather the sacrifice of *our lives* to Him in living service of faith and obedience.

Three examples from the OT prophets are given to support this argument, with the prophecies concerning Jesus as "The Rock". The first quote is from Isaiah 28:16 "... *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."*..." (1:2:6 NIV). God's cornerstone was very carefully chosen, and very precious. Through Him, and through our faith in Him we are assured of God's blessing. The foundation stone sets the layout for the rest of the building. Only the best stone is placed, as if it is wrong, then the rest of the building will not be true and square.

The prophecy comes from the time when God was going to deal with Israel, and allow them to be taken captive by the Assyrians in 722 BC because of their forsaking Him. However, whilst they will suffer, God will step in and save Judah, and will not forget His people. The time was going to come when the Messiah would come and redeem God's people – the chosen and precious cornerstone.

There is an assurance about the stone for Christians, however for those who do not believe in Him there is a warning "... *Therefore, to you who believe, He is precious; but to those who are disobedient, "The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone," ... and "A stone of stumbling and a rock of offense"...*" (1:2:7-8 NKJV). The first quote is from Ps 118:22, where the builders rejected a building block that later turned out to be the capstone in the building. The second warning comes from Isaiah 8:14, where those who are disobedient are described as stumbling over the stone. In this instance, Peter is warning that those who refuse to believe in Jesus as the Messiah, "... *They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed...*" (1:2:8 NKJV). The final statement by Peter shows that salvation is for everyone. Some have accepted it, whilst others have rejected it. They have rejected it because *they have stumbled over the rock!*

Unlike those who rejected the Messiah, "... *you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people...*" (1:2:9 NKJV). Peter emphasises the special position that Christians are held in. Whilst these are Jewish terms, Peter is emphasising the fulfilment of the OT

in the church and specifically in the Christians as God's chosen people. Whilst they might have felt forsaken in the backblocks of the Empire, and especially whilst under persecution, they were not forsaken by God. In fact Peter reminds them that "...you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light..." (1:2:9 NKJV).

They had been living under the power of Satan (ie darkness), but when they became Christians, they were enlightened, and filled with the true light of God (c/f Jn 1:4-9; 1 Jn 1:5-7). Before they became Christians, they were alienated from God "...who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy..." (1:2:10 NKJV).

Putting things into Practice

Peter gets back to the practicalities of Christian living again "...Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul..." (1:2:11 NKJV). The recognition that this world is not our home should drive and motivate us. We are only on this earth for a short time, but our true home is in heaven for eternity. The pain here and now is but for a short time, and we should control our *fleshly lusts* – which may include sexual immorality – but also participating in the pagan rights of the world, and especially in controlling our actions towards others. This can be clearly seen from the next verse "...having your conduct honourable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evil doers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation..." (1:2:12 NKJV). In facing the persecution (from the Gentiles – probably the Romans under direction from Nero), the Christians were to behave in such a way as there was nothing that could be said against them. However, this didn't stop the persecution against Christ, as the Jews brought false and trumped up charges against Him. The *day of visitation* is a reference to the time when the persecution comes, rather than to the return of Christ.

Behaving in such a way meant that they needed to keep all of the laws of the land – as much as possible, without breaking God's laws (an example might be a law of the land that required Emperor worship). "...Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors, as those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good..." (1:2:13-14 NKJV). By keeping the law, and showing proper respect to the authorities, there would be nothing to accuse them of, and nothing to punish them for. But more than just doing this to keep out of trouble "...this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men..." (1:2:15 NKJV). *God's will* is that we respect the authorities. Paul discusses this in detail in Romans 13.

No government that consistently rewards evil and punishes good can long survive, because evil is ultimately self-destructive. (NIVBC)

Peter has reminded them that those who were accusing them were *ignorant and foolish*. By contrast, the Christians are placed in a position of honour and privilege, and are exhorted to demonstrate their Christ-like characteristics. It would be easy to become puffed-up with conceit, and so they are instructed "...as free, yet not using your liberty as a cloak for vice, but as servants of God..." (1:2:16 NKJV).

Christ as our Example

Further instruction on Christian behaviour follows, especially to those who were slaves "...Slaves, submit yourselves to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh. ¹⁹ For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God. ²⁰ But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. ²¹ To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps..." (1:2:18-21 NIV). We often have pre-conceived ideas of what slavery was like, based on harsh practices and mis-treatments of

recent centuries. In the NT world, slaves were often just household servants who were bonded to a master, and sometimes even sold themselves for a period of time to “get ahead” in the world. Very often they would be treated well, but sometimes their masters harshly treated them. God’s instruction is to obey them even if they are treating them harshly.

Jesus’ example in the face of suffering is the model and pattern as to how we should behave in the face of unjust trials “... *“Who committed no sin, nor was guile found in His mouth” who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously...*” (1:2:22-23 NKJV). Peter quotes from Isaiah 53:9, the great chapter of prophecy concerning Christ’s sufferings. He further demonstrates His characteristics in the face of trials and sufferings, alluding to other references from the same chapter of Isaiah.

Peter explores the sufferings of the Messiah more deeply. He has stated that Christ was patient and innocent. Moreover, his sufferings for us are indeed expiatory and substitutionary. He did no sin (v. 22) and he "bore our sins" (v. 24; cf. Jn 1:29). The exact figure of bearing sins is not clear. It may be a reference to the scapegoat (Lev 16), to other Levitical sacrifices (cf. Lev 14:20; Isa 53:12), or to the basic ideas involved in the sacrificial system. The location of the expiatory offering was "in his body on the tree" (cf. Dt 21:23; Gal 3:13; Col 1:22). The purpose of Christ's death on the cross is to produce new life in the believer. By means of it all those who come to him end their old life and begin a new one devoted to righteousness (cf. Ro 6:1-14, 18-19; 2Co 5:14-15; Gal 2:20; 6:14). "By his wounds you have been healed" is Peter's application of this precious truth from Isaiah to Christian slaves who had received lashes unjustly. Formerly they were straying sheep (Isa 53:6; Lk 15:3-7) but now they "have returned" to Jesus, the "Shepherd and Overseer of your souls" (cf. Jn 10). (NIVBC)

Jesus’ example of triumphing through sufferings is shown by His death on the cross “...*He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls...*” (1:2:24-25 NIV). It was through Christ’s death – in fact His spiritual death when His Soul left His body and went and dwelt in Hades (Acts 2:31) – but for that to happen required His physical death – that He bore our sins. It was because Christ suffered in Hell on our behalf that we are made free from the punishment that we deserve. It is by Christ’s suffering – *His stripes* – that we are healed (made free from sin).

The greatness of Christ’s example stems from the good shepherd, who lays down His life for the sheep (Jn 10:11). We were like dumb sheep. We became lost and didn’t know the way back to home and safety. But we have been redeemed and returned to the guidance of the great Shepherd.