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Title: “You are a Chosen People, a Royal Priesthood, a Holy Nation”

Scripture text: 1st Peter 2:1-10

Scripture Reading: 1st Peter 2:1-10 (NASB - New American Standard Bible)

¹Therefore, putting aside all malice and all guile and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, ²like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, ³if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord.

⁴And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God, ⁵you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. ⁶For this is contained in Scripture: “BEHOLD, I LAY IN ZION A CHOICE STONE, A PRECIOUS CORNER *stone*, AND HE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM SHALL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED [Isaiah 28:16].”

⁷This precious value, then, is for you who believe; but for those who disbelieve, “THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED, THIS BECAME THE VERY CORNER *stone* [Psalm 118:22],” ⁸and, “A STONE OF STUMBLING AND A ROCK OF OFFENSE [Isaiah 8:14]”; for they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this doom they were also appointed.

⁹But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A ROYAL PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR GOD’S OWN POSSESSION, [Deut. 10:15, Isa. 43:20; Exod. 19:6; Rev. 1:6; Isa. 61:6; Deut. 7:6; Isa. 43:21, Mal. 3:17] so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; ¹⁰for you once were NOT A PEOPLE, but now you are THE PEOPLE OF GOD; you had NOT RECEIVED MERCY, but now you have RECEIVED MERCY. [Hos. 1:6,9,10, 2:23]

Good morning, everyone. It is good to see you all again. Last month, I began a series of sermons on the First Epistle of Peter and we covered chapter 1 of the letter. I think it would be a good idea for us to take a few minutes and review what we learned in chapter 1.

Let me read verses 1 and 2 – “¹Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen ²according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in fullest measure.”

The author of this epistle is Peter, the leader of the 12 disciples of Christ, also called apostles. He wrote this letter to churches in the regions of central Asia Minor. The churches in these areas were comprised mostly of Gentile Christians, with some Jewish Christians among them. The Apostle Peter says that are “chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father.” We see here that he draws a parallel between these followers of Christ and the people of Israel in the Old Testament – both are “chosen of God” to be His special people. In several other places in this epistle, Saint Peter will use Old Testament language to describe the members of the church of Jesus Christ. Bible scholars point out that it is clear that these people are mostly from a Gentile background because of the way Peter describes their former life. For example, in verse 14 of chapter 1 he says this: “As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance.” This is a description of former Gentiles, not of Jews who grew up knowing God’s standards of morality. So, scholars say that Peter’s audience is mostly Gentile Christians.

Note in verse 2 that all three members of the Trinity are mentioned. God the Father is the one who chooses us. Jesus Christ the Son is the one who shed His blood on our behalf and whose commands we are to obey. And the Holy Spirit has the task to fill our hearts and move our spirits to be “sanctified,” to be set apart from sin and to be more and more conformed to the image of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Notice in verse 1 that Peter calls these people “aliens” who reside in these various regions. This present world is not our home. We are citizens of heaven, as Philippians 3:20 tells us (“For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ”). We reside here only for a while. Again, we have some Old Testament imagery here: the people of Israel resided as aliens in lands not their own, and even when they were in the Promised Land, they were always to look up to God and follow His ways. God chose Abraham and Isaac and Jacob to be the patriarchs of the chosen people of God who were supposed to be separate from the pagan nations around them and be a witness to them of the True God.

In verses 3-5 we read – “³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, ⁵who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” Christ died for our sins and then He was raised from the dead to prove His victory over sin and death. We have a secure promise of an inheritance in heaven: eternal life with our Savior. All those who have placed their hope in Christ have this promise of eternal life. That is what salvation is all about. And Peter calls this a “living hope” which sustains us through all the trials and tribulations of life.

And then verses 6 and 7 speak of the various trials that we face in our life. These trials test our faith, refining our faith like gold is refined in fire. This is basically the same thing that James said in the first chapter of his epistle, where we are told to welcome trials because they produce maturity.

Peter then goes on in verse 13 to tell us to “gird your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” Standing firm on the promise of God’s grace, which will be fully brought to us when Jesus Christ returns, it is now time to set our minds on an active life of obedience and service.

And we must also clean up our lives. Verses 14-16 say this: “¹⁴As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, ¹⁵but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; ¹⁶because it is written, ‘YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY’.” As God’s chosen people, we are to reflect His holiness, separating ourselves from the world and all its ungodly lusts. Peter quotes the Scripture from the book of Leviticus, where God says, “YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY.” By the way, in the New American Standard Bible, New Testament quotations from the Old Testament are placed in all capital letters, as you see here on the screen. You will see more examples of this later in today’s message.

In verse 22, Peter introduces the theme that he will expand upon in chapter 2 of his epistle. 1 Peter 1:22-23 – “²²Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, **ferently love one another from the heart**, ²³for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and abiding word of God.” We are born again *through the living and abiding word of God*. As I pointed out last month, many people have testified that this book, the Bible, the Word of God, has transformed their lives, and history shows us that the gospel message has transformed countless individual people and whole societies as well.

In verse 22, Peter gives us a major exhortation: he calls on us to **ferently love one another from the heart**. This is the foundational starting point for life in the church, the loving fellowship of brothers and sisters who have all placed their faith in Christ and pledged their allegiance to following Him. In the Gospel of John, chapter 13, verses 34-35, Jesus has these words to say: “³⁴A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. ³⁵By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” It is by our love for one another in our Christian fellowship that the world will know that we are disciples of Jesus Christ.

Chapter 2 of Peter’s epistle begins with the word “Therefore.” *Therefore*, given everything that he has said in chapter 1, this is how love in the church should express itself.

1 Peter 2:1-3 – “¹Therefore, putting aside all malice and all guile and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, ²like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, ³if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord.” Again, I see echoes of the Epistle of James, where we were exhorted to rid ourselves of the quarrels and conflicts at church by cleaning out the lusts and the jealousies that lurk inside our own hearts so that our behavior toward

one another will be decent. These bad practices – these *vices*, as they are called in English – that Peter highlights are the kinds of things that destroy the fervent love that we are supposed to show to one another.

Let me quote some comments from Bible scholar Wayne Grudem:

The word *so*, or ‘therefore’, refers back to the command ‘love one another’ in verse 22. This verse explains in more detail what is involved in loving one another ‘earnestly’: one must *put away* (give up, get rid of) attitudes and habits which are harmful to others. . . .

Genuine love requires ridding one’s life of *all malice* (the Greek term *kakia* is broader, nearer to English ‘evil’ or ‘wickedness’, including not only ill intent but also any actions harmful to others), *all guile* (i.e. deceitfulness that harms others through trickery or falsehood), *insincerity* (or hypocrisy, the masking of inward evil by an outward show of righteousness — note this word in Matt. 23:28; Mark 12:15; Gal. 2:13), *envy* (the opposite of thankfulness for good which comes to others), and *all slander* (any speech which harms or is intended to harm another person’s status, reputation, etc. — the related verb is used in 2:12; 3:16; James 4:11). All these sins aim at harming other people, whereas love seeks the good of others.¹

Love seeks the good of others. We must put away (get rid of) attitudes and habits which are harmful to others. If we truly seek what is good for our brother or sister, we will not employ any of these vices in our dealings with people in the family of God.

Malice. This Greek word can mean *wickedness* or *evil* or *depravity*. Have you ever wished some wicked thing would happen to somebody you dislike or have you ever wished to do something harmful to another person, physically or emotionally? Take a look at your heart and remove that vice from your attitudes and actions.

Guile. This word could also be translated *deceit* or *trickery*. Have you ever lied for the sake of gaining an advantage in a situation? Seeking to gain advantage over another person by employing a lie is certainly not seeking the good of your fellow human being.

Hypocrisy. This is condemned throughout Scripture over and over again. The Greek word here refers to putting on a mask to play a part in a theatrical performance. Are you just pretending to be a Christian? Are you just pretending to be respectful to others? Are you just going through the motions of Christian behavior while actually having a different type attitude in your heart? In 1 Peter 1:22, which we read a few minutes ago, this is precisely the vice that Peter says we must be purified from – “²²Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love [sincere love!] of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart.”

Envy. This means selfishly wishing for your own benefit and not being thankful for the blessings of the other person.

Slander – literally, “evil speech.” This is described as a “habitual disparagement of others.”² Do you speak ill of other people? Do they actually deserve the kind of judgment that you have made against them? Or are you again thinking of yourself rather than thinking of how you can build up your brother or sister?

Let me quote from Bible scholar Thomas Schreiner:

The sins listed [here] tear at the social fabric of the church, ripping away the threads of love that keep them together. Peter signals thereby that no sin is to be tolerated in the community, that sin is to be rejected comprehensively.³

¹ Wayne A. Grudem, *1 Peter: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 17, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), pp. 98–99.

² Paul J. Achtemeier, *1 Peter: A Commentary on First Peter*, ed. Eldon Jay Epp, Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1996), p. 144.

³ Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, vol. 37, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2003), p. 98.

Sin is to be rejected comprehensively. Please take a look at the attitudes in your heart – and in your behavior – which may be disrespectful or harmful to your fellow Christians, or to anybody else. Clean these out, purify your hearts. Clean out the vices, and then promote the virtues, such love and honesty and kindness.

In looking at verses 1 and 2 here, which form a single sentence, grammarians of the Greek language tell us that the words “putting aside” are not in the imperative form as a direct command but are a participle. The main imperative in the sentence comes in verse 2: “long for.”

Let’s read verses 1 and 2 again – “¹Therefore, putting aside all malice and all guile and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, ²like newborn babies, **long for the pure milk of the word**, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation.” We are told to long for the pure milk of the word, because in this way we may grow spiritually ... in this way, we may, in Peter’s words “grow in respect to salvation.” The word “salvation” here is used in the same way as it was used in chapter 1: it isn’t the past-tense fact that we are saved but rather it is looking forward to the full realization of our salvation when Jesus returns. Therefore, we are expected to keep on growing spiritually throughout our lives here on earth.

To do this, we must long for the pure milk of the word of God. That word “long for” is a strong word, indicating craving: we are supposed to crave instruction from God’s Word the Bible with the same intensity that a newborn baby craves its mother’s milk. This verse might cause you to recall the usage of the metaphor of milk as basic Christian instruction in 1 Corinthians 3 and Hebrews 5, where the readers of those epistles were spiritually immature – however, Peter is using this illustration comparing milk to God’s Word in a different manner. His audience is not comprised of immature Christians but he is admonishing everyone in these churches to crave God’s Word and keep on growing throughout their lives. Let me repeat the lesson here: we are being exhorted to crave God’s Word with the same intensity that a baby craves its mother’s milk. That’s pretty intense – a baby craves milk every day and several times a day. I had this kind of intensity toward God’s Word when I was in my 20s and 30s. Today, I’m craving God’s Word differently than when I was younger, seeking to understand the whole big picture of the Bible’s history of salvation, but I still do it with intensity.

A parallel passage is Colossians 3:16 – “¹⁶Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.” We are exhorted to let the Word of Christ richly dwell (dwell!) within us. The words of Jesus are supposed to be dwelling in our hearts and minds. And in being filled with God’s Word, we may exhort and admonish one another to keep on growing as Christians. By the way, I did a sermon a few years ago entitled “Let the Word of Christ Richly Dwell Within You” in which I outlined various techniques for ingesting God’s Word – daily, and more than once in a day. I would encourage you to take a look at that sermon.

Back to 1 Peter chapter 2. We are exhorted to put aside several kinds of vices and crave the pure milk of the word. The milk must be pure – free of any contamination. And the Greek word for “word” here is *logikon*, which is actually an adjective related to the word *logos*. It means the genuine, spiritual word. The noun form of this word is used in chapter 1, verse 23 – it is the word *logou* or *logos*, meaning *a message* or *a communication*. We already read verses 22 and 23 earlier today and they run parallel to verses 1 and 2 here.

Again, 1 Peter 1:22-23 – “²²Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart, ²³for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and abiding word of God.” We need to purify our souls of all bad attitudes in order to have a sincere love of the brethren, for we have been born again through the living and abiding *logos* of God, word of God.

It is really so very, very important to crave God's word and read it and ingest it and let it transform your heart and soul.

Let us move on now to 1 Peter 2:4-6 – “⁴And coming to Him [Christ] as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God, ⁵you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. ⁶For this is contained in Scripture: ‘BEHOLD, I LAY IN ZION A CHOICE STONE, A PRECIOUS CORNER *stone*, AND HE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM SHALL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED’ [Isaiah 28:16].”

This reminds me of a passage I read last week when I was speaking on a different topic. I read for you Ephesians 2:19-22 (NKJV) – “¹⁹Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, ²⁰having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, ²¹in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, ²²in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.”

In both passages of Scripture, Christ is described as the Cornerstone of this spiritual house, the holy temple known as the church ... and we individual Christians are living stones which are being placed in the walls of this building as it is being built. It is important that each one of us play his or her part in building up this holy temple, the church of Jesus Christ. And remember that He is the Cornerstone of this building.

Peter highlights a certain aspect of this cornerstone. Originally, it was a stone that the builders had rejected and cast aside. As you read the story of Jesus, you learn that the Jewish leaders and the people rejected their Messiah and demanded that the Roman authorities crucify Him. They killed Jesus, but the grave could not keep Him. He was raised on the third day and is today seated on His throne in heaven at the right hand of God the Father (as we read in Hebrews 8:1 and Colossians 3:1). He sent the Holy Spirit to us to empower the church to spread the gospel, make disciples of all nations, and to keep building up this holy temple with more and more living stones: men and women who have been made followers of Christ.

Looking at verse 5, we see that we are called “a holy priesthood” and that we “offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” We no longer offer up animals in sacrifice, we are to offer up ourselves and our abilities and our activities as sacrifices to the Lord. Romans 12:1 – “¹Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.”

Let's move on to 1 Peter 2:7-8 – “⁷This precious value, then, is for you who believe; but for those who disbelieve, ‘THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED, THIS BECAME THE VERY CORNER *stone*,’ [Psalm 118:22] ⁸and, ‘A STONE OF STUMBLING AND A ROCK OF OFFENSE’ [Isaiah 8:14]; for they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this doom they were also appointed.” Certain people keep on rejecting Jesus Christ the cornerstone. In fact, He is ‘A STONE OF STUMBLING AND A ROCK OF OFFENSE’ for these unbelievers. This was prophesied in Isaiah 8:14 that disobedient Israel and disobedient Judah will find that God is a stone that they will trip on and stumble over. In the history of the Old Testament, we often find Israel being faithless and disobedient, and this continues even in the New Testament when the Jews reject their Messiah.

Peter goes on to say this to his Christian audience in verses 9-10 – “⁹But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A ROYAL PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR GOD'S OWN POSSESSION, [Deut. 10:15, Isa. 43:20; Exod. 19:6, Rev. 1:6; Isa. 61:6; Deut. 7:6, Isa. 43:21, Mal. 3:17] so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; ¹⁰for you once were NOT A PEOPLE, but now you are THE PEOPLE OF GOD; you had NOT RECEIVED MERCY, but now you have RECEIVED MERCY [Hos. 1:6,9,10, 2:23].”

If you recall, near the beginning of today's message, I told you that in the New American Standard Bible, New Testament quotations from the Old Testament are in all capital letters, as you see here on the screen – Peter puts several Old Testament references in these verses here.

Every time I read this passage in 1 Peter 2, I marvel at the Old Testament language that Peter uses to describe we Christian believers. From various parts of the Old Testament, Peter uses a variety of phrases about God's chosen people Israel and applies them to the Christian community. We are called "A CHOSEN RACE ... A ROYAL PRIESTHOOD ... A HOLY NATION ... A PEOPLE FOR GOD'S OWN POSSESSION." I marvel at this because I was taught to take the Bible literally, and when I read the Old Testament prophecies to Israel and Judah, I assume that they apply just to Israel and Judah.

For example: the promise of a New Covenant. Let's look at Jeremiah 31:31. Please remember that Scripture reference: Jeremiah 31:31. Let's read that verse and on through verse 34 – ³¹"Behold, days are coming," declares the Lord, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, ³²not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them," declares the Lord. ³³"But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days," declares the Lord, "I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. ³⁴They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them," declares the Lord, "for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."

This new covenant is clearly made originally for Israel and Judah, but Jesus expanded it to include the Gentiles. At the Last Supper, we read this in Luke 22:20 – "And in the same way He took the cup after they had eaten, saying, 'This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood'." Here, Jesus is clearly instituting the New Covenant: it is His sacrifice of Himself for the forgiveness of our sins. And in the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19 and Luke 24:47, Jesus told His apostles to bring this message of repentance for the forgiveness of sins to all the nations and to baptize all nations. This New Covenant is now open to Jew and Gentile alike. I wish I could say more on this topic, but I will close today's message on that thought.

Let us review some of the main lessons from today's passage in 1 Peter:

- Like Israel of old, we Christians have been chosen of God to enjoy His covenantal love.
- Salvation is the work of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – the Father's choice, the Son's sacrificial death and victorious resurrection, and the Spirit's sanctifying work in our lives.
- We must purify our hearts and rid them of all malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy and slander.
- Then we will be ready to fervently love one another from the heart.
- We are to long for the pure milk of the word of God, letting it transform our hearts.
- Christ is the cornerstone of the church and we are living stones in that holy temple of God.
- We Christians – Jews and Gentiles alike – are a chosen race and a royal priesthood ... partakers of the new covenant.