

“THE PRIESTHOOD OF BELIEVERS” Part 1

HOLINESS

1 Peter 2:4-10

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Bruce: Gracious and loving sovereign Lord, we stand in awe of the fact that what You ordained your Son accomplished, and the Holy Spirit applies it to our lives, even today. Father, we pray that Your Holy Spirit would fulfill His job description. Open our eyes, that we might behold You more clearly, for Jesus’ sake. May it be so for His glory. Amen.

Men: Amen.

Bruce: I invite you to open your Bibles, men, to 1 Peter chapter 2, looking at verses 4-10. Last week, in the first three verses, we looked at the difference between church maturity, church growth and church expansion. We’ve seen that church growth is really growing in your salvation, which is something that continually goes on all the time.

So let me read, beginning at chapter 2, the first ten verses, so we’ll understand the context.

“So put away all malice, and all deceit, and hypocrisy and envy, and all slander. Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good. As you come to Him, a living stone, rejected by men, but in the sight of God chosen and precious, 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. For it says in Scripture, “Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believe in Him will not be put to shame.”” “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,” and “a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense.”” “They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do. 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. 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.” This is the word of the Lord.

Men: Thanks be to God.

Bruce: Amen. Well, I have a strong conviction that, in our churches today, there exists a deeply rooted unbiblical concept of a two-tier level of ministry in the church. One level is what we would call the clergy, or the professional ministry, those in “full time ministry.” They’re trained and paid, and expected to do all the ministering in the local church. At the other level is what we would call the laity, which generally views themselves as the audience, who pays for the performance of the clergy and all the ministers, and because these people now view themselves as the audience, they believe that they have the right to criticize what the clergy does or doesn’t do. How many times

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have you heard somebody say, “I’m not going back to that church because I didn’t get a blessing?” Well, you weren’t designed to get one. You were designed to what?

Men: Give.

Bruce: Give one. That’s what worship is. You are designed to give a blessing. No one expects much of the laity anymore. People expect too much of the pastorate.

Now I’m not suggesting, friends, that there is not a role for the pastor. That’s not what I’m saying. All I’m saying is that, in our culture today in America, we have made such a severe division between those who are in full time ministry versus those who are not. That’s my point of contention this morning. I have a deep conviction that this is an unbiblical concept, based upon the passage that we’re studying.

The New Testament contradicts that two tier level of ministry, the paid professionals and the laity. In fact, when you look at the word “clergy,” it is the word *kleros*. The word literally means “a lot, a portion.” It means “an inheritance, or shares.” When you refer to that as a person, it means an allotted person. The clergy is an allotted person.

Take a passage such as 1 Peter chapter 5, verse 3. Turn over and read that. It’s instruction to the elders. Peter says that elders are instructed not to “lord it over those entrusted to you.”

Now those words “entrusted to you,” translated in the New American Standard Bible mean “entrusted to your charge.” It’s the word *kleros*. It’s the word “clergy.” Do you understand that? That’s the word clergy. So here is how it reads in verse 3. “Not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.” In other words, who is the clergy?

Participant: It’s everybody.

Bruce: Everybody. That’s the point that Peter is making. They are the allotted persons to whom you are not to lord it over, but to be an example for them as the elders of the church. So the elders of the church are really the ones who are to be models for the clergy. The clergy would be those allotted persons who make up the local church.

Now that does not mean that we don’t have clergy ecclesiastically, those in positions of authority. That is not what I’m saying. All I’m saying is that we need to understand who the real clergy are. It is those who, as we will see, are identified with the Person and work of Christ. The word “clergy” means allotted persons, not some special group within the church, although the church does have people who have special gifts and assignments, as we see in the book of Ephesians. Christ gives gifts to people, to the church, for specific reasons. Our value and our worth is the same, but we have different distinctive responsibilities, based upon the Person and work of Christ, as He gives gifts to the church. So please understand what I’m not saying. I’m not saying that, ecclesiastically, there isn’t a role for the clergy, as we call them. All I say is that we need to help people to understand that they are the clergy just as much as the rest of us are.

In fact, in the church that I pastored in Chicago, on our church bulletin we had my title as “pastor/teacher,” and the clergy was the membership. The clergy was all the members of the church, and we’re going to see that today in our passage, as we look at 1 Peter chapter 2, verses 4-10.

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Now does this concept sound new, or different? It has always been God’s design. Let me take you back to Exodus chapter 19, verse 6. “Although the whole earth is Mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation. These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites.” It has always been God’s plan to have His people have free access to Him, and to be the priests, the ones who worship Him and bring glory to Him, to be known themselves as “a kingdom of priests.” Now that is who we are, brothers. We are a kingdom of priests.

Now that does not mean that you have the ecclesiastical authority that a person has who is gifted in the church to be a pastor/teacher, or to be a minister. That’s not what I’m saying. All I’m trying to say is that, collectively, we are the clergy. We are the allotted ones who build up this new structure not made by hands, but made by the spiritual input of the Holy Spirit, as we’ll see in a moment. It has always been God’s plan.

So where did we get this turned around? Brothers, to the best of my ability to investigate this, the form that we now have originated somewhere in the early third century. We see that the church leaders assigned sacramental value to Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Sacramental value means causing grace. Ministers then began to be called priests because they dispensed grace by the administering of the sacraments. That began around the third century.

Now Peter deals with this issue, this concept of the priesthood, in these verses, by contrasting what God is now building versus what God had built in the temple in Jerusalem. Now we need to understand to whom Peter is writing. He’s writing to a group of believers living in five different provinces. You see that in chapter 1, verses 1-12. Many of them were Jews, who prided themselves much on the temple worship in Jerusalem. That is one group he is writing to. He is also writing to another group of people who had no experience with the temple worship in Jerusalem.

So it seems to me that Peter, under the inspiration of the omniscient Holy Spirit, wants to impart some consolation to those who had never been permitted to worship at the temple in Jerusalem. So remember, you have two kinds of people—those who were really prideful of their worship at the temple in Jerusalem, and those who never had that experience, and Peter is writing to both of them. So I think that he’s trying to comfort the Jews, newly converted to Christ, who saw that the glorious temple building was about to be destroyed.

Now let’s look at the timing of this geographically and chronologically. 1 Peter was written somewhere between 61 and 64 A.D. Josephus indicates that the temple in Jerusalem was burned on August the 29th, A.D. 70 by Titus, who was the son of Vespasian, a ruler of the Roman Empire.

Now I think that what he is doing is confirming for us that the temple of God is now a building that is not made with human hands, but made by the Spirit of the living God, and to confirm our role as His priesthood. Now notice the contrast. The old contrast was that the temple was built by stones and marble and wonderful material things. Now, the temple that He is building is not one like that; it’s totally different. It’s a holy priesthood. It’s not made by human hands, but by the work of the Holy Spirit.

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So today, I want us to see three things as we move into this section, and we’ll see how far we get today. I want you to see three things in this passage. First of all, are there any questions on what we’ve covered so far? Do you understand the distinction, what I’m not saying? I’m not saying that there is not a role for the ministers or the clergy, as we refer to them. All I’m trying to help you realize is this: that you and I are the clergy just as much as they are. They have specific assignments that God the Holy Spirit, through the Person and work of Christ has given them, for the benefit of the church. But we need to understand our roles also. We are the ones being built into a temple not made with human hands. Yes, Don?

Don: Bruce, I think that it’s very interesting that you pointed out Exodus 19:6, in the Old Testament. And we know that, in that same book, God instituted the priesthood.

Bruce: He did.

Don: Aaron and Moses and that kind of thing. And yet, even then, at that very early time, all of Israel was a kingdom of priests.

Bruce: Absolutely.

Don: I think it was very good that you pointed that out.

Bruce: That’s the history of God’s intention, which has been that all of God’s people would be a kingdom of priests. Yes, please?

Participant: Bruce, if things began to change in the third century, as you said, when the priesthood started to be viewed as a separate entity, what did the early church fathers like Augustine and those guys say? Did they have anything to say about that?

Bruce: Yes.

Participant: Can you talk about that? I don’t necessarily want to go in to church history, but I’m very curious.

Bruce: Bishop Rodgers or Ted, do you want to add anything in church history about that?

Bishop Rodgers: I’m not sure when the concepts began to operate, a little later when it started. I know that it was in northern Africa, up to the time of Cyprian—I don’t remember the exact dates—the early Christians used to say, “We have no altar because Christ and His sacrifice has brought that to perfection.” But Cyprian decided to flip that around as an apologetic and say, “We have a superior altar and a superior sacrifice.” And that begins to move in the direction of casting doubt upon the sufficiency, finally, of the sacrifice of Christ.

Bruce: Right.

Bishop Rodgers: So, whatever you do, you don’t attack the absolute sufficiency of the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ.

Bruce: Amen. Thank you. That’s very helpful, Bishop. Thank you. Yes, Ted?

Ted: But, having said that, (laughter), I think it would be incorrect to say that somehow, in the third century, you were ascribing grace by the sacraments conveying grace, but that it has been a doctrine held throughout church history. The Reformers held it. Luther held it. Calvin held it, that grace, in some way, is conveyed through the sacraments.

Bruce: Now that’s true.

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Ted: It would be certain Anabaptist groups that would say, “No; it’s purely symbolic.

Bruce: Correct.

Bishop Rodgers: But Ted is not saying that the church was teaching *ex opera operato*, that just the doing of it automatically—

Bruce: That’s right.

Bishop Rodgers: Irrespective of the attitude of the recipient.

Bruce: That’s correct.

Bishop Rodgers: So, with Anglicans, if I can make just one comment, we start with what God is doing in the sacrament, not with—

Bruce: Not with what are we doing?

Bishop Rodgers: We’re receiving grace, and then responding.

Bruce: Yes. My point is that I’m saying that in the third century they began saying that there were certain individuals who were the dispensers of grace, as opposed to God being the Dispenser. That was my point of mentioning the third century.

Bishop Rodgers: Good point. We’re not the dispensers.

Bruce: We are not the dispensers. God is doing that in the sacraments, but we are not the dispensers of it.

Bishop Rodgers: Absolutely.

Bruce: Yes, please, Dale?

Dale: Being is more important than doing.

Bruce: Thank you, poet laureate! (*Laughter.*) You’re right. Amen. Yes, sir?

Participant: Getting back to the authority of the priesthood, when you’re saying authority between priest and congregation, but do we not have the authority to minister to one another?

Bruce: Absolutely. Let me finish now. This is all introduction. Look at your outline, because we’re going to take a look at three features that Peter teaches us.

First of all, he wants to identify for us the priesthood. There is an identity description here of the priesthood. You’ll notice that he does this in three ways. First of all, those who come to Him are part of the priesthood. That’s verse 4. And then those who conform to Him are part of the priesthood, and then those who have a common identity with Him. He’s identifying the priesthood with three different descriptions—those who come to Him, those who conform to Him, (meaning Christ), and those who have a common identity with Him, (meaning Christ.) That is what he is saying is the identity of the priesthood. And we’ll get into each one of those separately. Yes, Bill?

Bill: Do you want to talk about the verb tense there?

Bruce: When we get there, I will. (*Laughter.*) Hang on a minute.

Okay, those are the things we want to observe. Take a look, first of all, at this. The identity of the priesthood is those who come to Him. What does it mean to come to Him? Those who come to Christ for salvation, while others reject him. That’s the context of what we’re saying. There are certain people who come to Christ for salvation,. Now you understand this, at least you’re being taught this, hopefully, that what God ordained, the Holy Spirit will apply, because Christ accomplished it. What the Father ordained, the Son accomplished, and the Holy Spirit applies. He is first of all saying that the

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priesthood is made up, identity wise, of those who come to Him in saving faith, coming to Him and trusting Him for their salvation. When a person is saved, whether hands or laid on him or not, that spiritual baptism is their official ordination as a priest, into the body of Christ—not a priest ecclesiastically, but into the body of Christ, the priesthood of all believers. They become “a kingdom of priests.” It is their ordination into the “priesthood,” if you will, at the moment of their salvation. That is what it means to come to Him.

Now there is only one Priest. That is Jesus, who is the great High Priest, and at conversion, all believers are His royal priesthood. We’ve become the real royal priesthood, but there is only one High Priest. That is how we need to understand what Peter is teaching us. He is not saying that we are elevated in our position. There is only one High Priest, and that is Christ Himself, and we become the kingdom of priests, working with our High Priest, the Lord Jesus Himself.

So what does it mean to come to Him? We need to understand that. Take a look at verse 7. I think that is your best definition of it. “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.””

Now how do we define verse 7—those who believe? Well, there are several ways of doing that. It’s an act of the soul, in which we, with all of our sin and weakness, cast ourselves upon Christ. It means to adhere to, depend upon, rely upon and trust in. It’s the acrostic DART. To believe in the Greek text is a very aggressive word. It doesn’t mean to give mental assent. It means that you’re doing something in the depth of your soul. You’re adhering to the Person and work of Christ. You’re depending upon the Person and work of Christ. You’re relying upon the Person and work of Christ, and you’re trusting in the Person and work of Christ. That’s why I say that it’s an act of the soul, in which we come with all of our weakness and all of our sin, and cast ourselves upon Christ by belief. The first indication of your salvation is the fact that you believe. A dead man cannot believe. Regeneration does something supernatural, and that is that it causes you to have a desire to believe, and that is the first indication that you are now ordained into the priesthood of all believers.

So then, notice the verb tense here in verse 4. “As you come to Him, a living stone, rejected by men, but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves, like living stones, are being built up.” Now notice: that’s present tense. This is something that constantly happens. You don’t just come to Christ once. You constantly come to Christ, moment by moment, day by day. That’s what it means to grow and to mature, as we saw last week.

Notice chapter 2, verses 1 and 2. “Long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation.” And there is your definition of church growth. It’s growing up into salvation. And you do that by constantly coming to Christ, by casting yourself upon Him, by darting, by depending upon, adhering to, relying upon and trusting. It is something that you’re constantly doing, a present tense reality. This coming to Christ is not a one-time event. It’s something you do repetitiously. It’s a style of life. I’m always coming to Christ. That’s what it means. It’s not just one time that you do that, and sign a

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card and raise your hand, and walk forward. Sometimes we relegate that to a single act. But Peter is saying that this is a constant act, because it's by the act of your constantly coming that you're being built.

Now notice. This is in the context of spiritual food. I used the infant illustration last week. A baby grows by desiring the pure spiritual milk. The same thing happens when you and I come to Him constantly, by desiring pure spiritual milk, the word of Scripture. It's the sufficiency of Scripture.

So why do some people have a more vibrant Christian faith? It's because they're coming to Christ every day. They're coming to Him repeatedly. They're coming to Him all the time. They're coming to Christ, because that's the way the style of life is generated in them. Their souls have changed. Something has happened to them, and they're constantly coming to Christ, moment by moment. That's why they have a more vibrant spiritual life, because they're growing! They're growing into their salvation. If you want a definition of church growth, look at verse 2. “That you may grow up into salvation.” That's maturity. That's church growth. That is not church expansion. You're growing up into your salvation, and how do you do that? Peter says that you do that by constantly coming to Christ. That is how you are identified with your ordination into the holy priesthood, the priesthood of believers, but it's also the process by which you grow in that relationship, as being one of the priests of His kingdom.

So why do some people have a more vibrant Christian life? It's because they are constantly coming, and they are being built. Being built into what? Being built up into their salvation. That's Christian maturity. That's Christian growth.

Now notice. Because they come to Christ, believing, they take God at His word—the sufficiency of Scripture. So here's what happens. As you are constantly coming to Christ, moment by moment, this is a style of life, because you are now part of the priesthood of believers. Your affections are altered by Christ when you constantly come to Him. Your goals are directed by Christ, as you constantly come to Him. And your conduct is controlled by Christ, as you constantly come to Him.

Now when you look at those things, your affections, your goals, and your conduct are all altered, directed, and controlled by Christ, as you are constantly coming, and in the process of that, you are being built up. Something is happening to you, and that is called maturity. You're growing in grace. You're growing in your faith in Christ, because you're constantly coming.

So who are the ones who are identified as the priesthood? It is those who have come and are coming to Christ by faith and by trust. That's the first identity.

Peter has already explained how we come to Jesus on a continual basis. Look at verses 2 and 3, which we looked at last week. It's the picture of a baby being nurtured by milk. A hungry baby is a healthy baby. A hungry believer is a healthy believer. Do you have a hunger for the Word? That's an indication of your maturity, because this is the means by which you keep coming to Christ. To crave means to have an intense desire. Your desires change, as you come to Christ on a moment by moment basis.

I don't know if many of you have pets. Years ago, when I had my Doberman, Dirk, he was a great companion. But I always noticed that every time I opened a cereal box,

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something happened to him physically. First of all, his ears went up! Secondly, his feet ran! When he came, he sat right before me, and he sat down, and just looked at me with his tongue out. (*Laughter.*) And what was he doing? He was craving something! He was craving the food, because he heard that the food was going to be opened up, and he might just get some. (*Laughter.*)

Now, is that us? When you hear the noise of Scripture, (*Bruce turns the pages*), do your ears go up? Do your feet run to church? When the church is open for a worship service, are you the first one there? You see, that’s what Peter is saying. That is the response of someone who is growing into salvation, because it’s an indication that you are repetitiously coming to Christ, because your affections have been altered. Your goals have been changed, and your conduct is being directed because you understand this—that you are to grow up into your salvation. And Peter is saying that this is the identity of a person who is part of the royal priesthood of God’s kingdom.

He uses the illustration—and we went into some depth last week—of an infant. Growth in an infant is the most decisive sign of life. And where there is no hunger, there is serious trouble in the life of that child. And I would say this. Where there is no hunger for the Word, there is serious trouble in the priesthood. Yes, Jim?

Jim: Bruce, I think, and I can’t remember the specific number, but Barna has done research that says that something like sixty, seventy, eighty per cent of Christians in America have no real hunger to go further. They are just sort of content where they are. That’s what we see.

Bruce: I’m sure that’s evidenced by what we see is going on in our society. You see, the church is called to change society, and we’re not doing that. Society is changing us. That is because we’ve lost this hunger. You see, we need to teach this idea of repetitiously, continually, coming to Christ. You are being built up. You are growing into your salvation. That’s maturity, and you do that by desiring the Word. Yes, Don?

Don: Bruce, also, to go with what Jim was saying, there are so many people today in our society who call themselves Christians, (and you’ve pointed this out before), who say that they have no need for the church.

Bruce: Right.

Don: “Oh, I love Christ, but I don’t like the organized church,” and verse 5 just screams against that.

Bruce: Absolutely.

Don: “You also, as living stones, are being built up into a spiritual house.” It’s not just me and Jesus. It’s all of us. It’s the church. It’s all of God’s people together, building one another up. If you don’t have a desire for that, as well as the Word, then I think that’s trouble also. **Bruce:** There are two things the Scripture says will last forever, and those are the two things that you and I need to hook up and ride our wagon up against, and those are the word of God and the church. Those are the two things that will last forever. The rest of us will all be dissipated. But the two things that will last forever are His Word and the church, and if you want to be involved with something that is eternal, get involved in the local church, where the Word is being preached. So yes. Question?

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Participant: How do you manage, in my mind, what is the resulting tension from the discussion we’re having of man’s eventual, and, it seems, inevitable modification of the church to fit a certain mindset, using the altar as an example? No altar, now an altar. It seems that you can almost follow religions down this path as to what humans do to them. On the other side, we’re talking about, without the church—I guess maybe I’m answering my own question here by saying that you have to watch what man does to the church, versus the concept of church that you’re talking about, that we should be seeking. I’m just perpetually confused by this, because, as we become, and I’m struggling to shorten this as much as I can. I’m struggling with the church as what it has become, and seeking that, versus the church that we’re supposed to be seeking here, versus what it seems to be, the church that God created, which really was just a person and a relationship to Christ. It seems like, somehow, there is a perversion going on.

Bruce: Oh, no question. That perversion has been going on for centuries, and it will continue until the Lord returns. Now I’m going to give you a very simple answer: the sufficiency of Scripture.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: That’s the battle ground. It’s the sufficiency of Scripture. All the issues of the church moving in this direction is because they say, “The Scripture is our authority. Therefore we have the authority to do this,” because they interpret it their own way. But, when you go back, the real battle ground is not authority; it’s sufficiency. Is the Scripture sufficient for all the things that we need in the life of the church? The answer is yes. Those who deviate from that say, “No. We need extra-biblical revelation to help us understand it, because it’s cultural.”

Now several years ago I was at a luncheon with a man in Pittsburgh who is now deceased, a very, very godly man. And we were talking about something that the Scripture prohibits, but culture has embraced. And his response was this. “How can you take that position in today’s culture?” I was taking the opposite position. I was taking the Biblical position. Scripture doesn’t permit that.

His response was, “How can you hold that position in today’s culture?” That’s exactly what you’re referring to. You see, we have culturized the Scripture, and made it fit into the culture, rather than saying that the Scripture is sufficient. I don’t mean to give you a simplistic answer, but it is simple. It is the sufficiency of Scripture. Do we hold to that, or do we not? Bill?

Bill: When you were in that setting before, I thought you were going to take him to the stance of the Reformers, and one of their main tenets was the sufficiency of Scripture.

Bruce: that’s it. *Sola Scriptura*. Yes, Bill?

Bill: Speaking about the Reformation, at that time, the ministry of the church was wrapped up in the priest. They did it all.

Bruce: Correct.

Bill: The Reformers emphasized the priesthood of all believers, and that is what we’re reading here, and my understanding, as they understood it, was that every member of a priest, and has a part in the ministry.

Bruce: Absolutely.

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Bill: In the church, it is now turned around again completely, where we have personalities in the pulpit, and we have certain individuals that do everything. They’re on a council, they’re elders, they’re playing instruments, and just a handful of people have the ministry in the church.

Bruce: That was my introduction. My whole point was that there is an unbiblical separation between what you just described and what is biblically correct in the Scripture. We are all part of the priesthood of believers. We’re all part of the kingdom of priests. That is who we are, and I’m trying to help you understand. How does Peter say that somebody who is identified? That is by the person who comes to Christ. Do you see that? The person who is coming to Christ by faith is the one who is now ordained into the priesthood, under our High Priest, the Lord Jesus Himself, and we are now a kingdom of priests.

Now that means that we need to get into the next expression. What are my responsibilities as being one part of this kingdom of priests? What is my responsibility? We’ll get into that in future weeks.

So you’re absolutely right. We need to talk about that we are the clergy. Now we’re not teaching people that, because they think that somebody else is, and that’s because we have relegated the audience in the church to be just an audience to be entertained. So they criticize the pastor because they’re not getting what they want. Ted?

Ted: I think it would be inaccurate to say that there was a time in the church when it was very good, and then it got worse.

Bruce: Correct.

Ted: If you read the Epistles carefully, you’ll see that there were serious problems. The church has gone through periods for two thousand years of having more difficulties or less, but there has always been an issue. And I have to admit that I get frustrated with the church, and when I get impatient, I have to remember god’s patience with me.

Bruce: Absolutely.

Ted: I’m one part of the problem, and I’d rather deal with the problem, but God will look at me and say, “No. You’re the problem.” And so I think it’s very easy to jump on the church.

Bruce: That’s correct. It’s obvious that the church has had a problem, or Peter wouldn’t be writing this letter. (*Laughter.*) He’s doing the same thing. This isn’t new, or he wouldn’t be writing this. He was writing to correct a situation that was occurring. Yes, bishop?

Bishop Rodgers: It’s a little bit more radical, and if you haven’t touched on that, surely you eventually will. But, in the New Testament, the priesthood refers only to Christ and the church.

Bruce: Correct.

Bishop Rodgers: It never, not even once, refers to what we presently call the clergy.

Bruce: Amen.

Bishop Rodgers: and that cannot have been a mistake. It had to be intentional, because all that background in the New Testament would easily have given the word “priesthood” to the clergy, but they didn’t.

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Bruce: they didn’t do that.

Bishop Rodgers: They called them “shepherds.” They called them “teachers, pastor/teachers.” They never used (*a Greek phrase*) for the clergy, not even once.

Bruce: That’s correct. Excellent. Do you understand that there is only one Priest. That is Christ Jesus Himself, and all the rest of us, the church, would be the priesthood, the kingdom of believers. That’s it. Yes, please?

Participant: Do you think it would be fair to maybe see the model for the health of a church by how many of the members are in some kind of active participation?

Bruce: Well, there are many ways you can do that. Why certainly, yes, how many people are involved? What does ministry generate?

Now I want to look at this. Look at verse 2 again. “That you may grow up into salvation.” Now there is the Biblical definition of church growth. You are growing up in your salvation. Now what is the most natural thing for someone who is growing up?

Take the illustration of a tree. What is the most natural indication of growth in a tree? It is what?

Men: Fruit.

Bruce: Fruit! You’ve got to look at the fruit of the people who are in the church. What is the fruit? Not their activity. The difference between a cult and a Christian church is fruit versus work. You see, the fruit in the believer who is growing up in his salvation is the most natural thing. It is fruit! We observe their fruit. “By their fruits you will know them.” Now in the cults, those that are not Christian oriented, they will say that you work in order to create eternal life. In Christianity, the result of your eternal life is fruit. What is the fruit of your life? It’s the fruit of the Spirit. That’s how we evaluate things. And so the real contrast is, am I trying to give evidence of the life that is within me?, because fruit is an expression of that which is within me. Peter is saying that, when you keep coming to Christ, something is going to happen. You’re going to grow up in your salvation, and that is church growth. There will be evidential fruit.

And the Scripture defines fruit for us in many, many different ways. The fruit of the Spirit is a good place to start, in Galatians 5. So the real test of the church is what fruit do I see in the individual believers collectively, because they are the “kingdom of priests?”

Now are people taught this? No. They are taught to go to another church because you like the music because it’s better. You like the preaching because it’s better.

I saw a cartoon the other day that had some truth to it. It said, “Reformed theology, or Biblical theology, teaches this. God is most glorified when mankind is happy in Christ.” Unbiblical theology would say this. “Man is most glorified when God is happy in you.” You see, the real issue is this. Am I happy in Christ? That’s what glorifies God.

Remember this. The role of the church is god and His glory, not me in my entertainment. It’s God in his glory! And am I most happy in Christ? That’s when God is glorified, because the evidence of that is going to be what? I’m going to be growing up in my salvation, and the evidence of that will be—

Participant: Fruit.

“THE PRIESTHOOD OF BELIEVERS” Part 1

Bruce: Fruit. Now let me give you this stupid example, and I’ve done it before, about the apple tree. The most natural thing for an apple tree is to what? Bear fruit. Do you ever see an apple tree grunt? Do you ever see an apple tree go like this? (*Bruce grunts.*) I think I can. I’m going to work myself to create something. Do you ever see a tree do that? No. the most natural thing for an apple tree is this. (*Bruce portrays apples falling from the tree.*) An apple appears. It’s fruit! That’s the evidence that you’re coming to Christ.

So if you want to evaluate the role of the church, don’t try to come up with some matrix. Just look at the people and say, “Is there fruit?” That will tell you about those who are coming to Christ.

So the first identity is this. Those who come to Christ are identified as the priesthood. So they are ordained into the kingdom of priests, because they keep coming to Christ. The first indication of those who constitute the priesthood is that those who have already come to Christ, believing for salvation, also continually come to Him through His word, because they desire to grow in their salvation. That is church growth. Church growth is not church expansion. Those are two different things. Don’t confuse them.

That means that the result of those continually coming to Christ is this. They are being built into what Christ already is. That means that they conform to Him. Look at verse 5. “As you come to Him, a living stone, rejected by men, but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves, like living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house.” Something is going on. We’re conforming to Him. Christ is glorified. As Peter says, He is the living stone, meaning the source of life. Christ is the living stone, the source of life, in the church. He is precious to God because He was chosen by God. Now notice that. He is precious to God because He was chosen by God.

What does that say about you? That you are what?

Participant: Precious.

Bruce: Precious. Why? Because He chose you! You see, that’s why you’re precious! It’s because He chose you! It’s not because of what you do! It’s because of who He is! It’s because of what God the Father ordained, God the Son accomplished, and the Holy Spirit applied. That’s why you’re precious, because He chose you in grace!

Now that doesn’t give us a reason to be prideful or egotistical. It ought to be deeply humbling. It should drive us to our knees with gratitude. “God, You hold me precious because You did something for me that I could not do for myself? I could not earn Your esteem, or earn my worth, or earn my value? You gave it to me when You chose me from before the foundation of the world?” You see, it’s the beautiful, compassionate, tender, loving, gracious, merciful doctrine of election! It’s the most merciful doctrine in all of the Scripture, because God gives you preciousness, because that’s how He views you! He chose you, just as He chose Christ to be the living stone. You are one of those stones which are being built into a spiritual house, not the temple in Jerusalem again, not a physical building, but a spiritual building, of which you and I are members. We’re the bricks and the mortar, because God has now chosen you, and you are precious, like the Cornerstone Himself.

“THE PRIESTHOOD OF BELIEVERS” Part 1

Peter says that, if you are elect in Christ, you are alive and precious to God because you are chosen by God. And notice how you are described, as a living stone. A living stone means what? That there is growth going on. There is fruit coming as a result of this, because you are a living stone, not a dead one. You’re a living stone. You’re described as living stones, just like Christ.

Now let me help you understand something in a few minutes, and then we’ll continue on this. And I do appreciate your questions, because this is so important for us, as a kingdom of priests, to understand our role in this.

Let me just show you some things here. Christ is presented in verses 1-3 as food. “Desire the pure spiritual milk.” It’s the illustration of the infant baby. He is described as being food, but he is also here being described as a stone.

Now this is very common imagery for the Person and work of Christ in the Scripture, Christ being portrayed as a stone. Let me give you some examples. He is projected as “a stumbling stone” in Isaiah chapter 8, verse 14. To those who do not believe, He is a stumbling stone. “How can you take that position in today’s culture?” He is a stumbling stone.

Secondly, He is the “foundation stone.” Isaiah chapter 28, verse 16. In Isaiah 51:1 He is referred to as the “parental rock.” He’s our Father’ He’s our Parent. That is His role.

He is the rejected but vindicated “building stone” in Psalm 118 verse 22. And then also, in Daniel 2 verse 34, He is referred to as “the supernatural stone.”

And then, in Zechariah 12 verse 3, He is referred to as “the burdensome stone.”

You see, there are many images of Christ. But here He is referred to as being “a living stone.” But that is what He says that you are. When you come to Christ, you are being built into a spiritual house, because you are the living stone of which Christ is building, using you and me as bricks to build this spiritual temple. Here He is being referred to as the cornerstone or the temple that God is building.

Now this temple is not being made up of gold and material, and costly stones, but a temple made up of living material, of redeemed people, in which God resides. It is using living stones, which are you and I, the ones who have come to Christ, and keep coming to Him because we are growing in our salvation.

The idea is this, that when anyone comes to Christ, a new stone is added to the spiritual house. A new stone is added! Do you understand? That’s why we celebrate church membership—not joining the church, but joining the royal priesthood, because they are coming to Christ. We celebrate that, because now a living stone has been added to this building that is being built. It’s expanding!

Every building has a cornerstone, of which it can be constructed. As we come to Christ, and derive from Him all the resources of our lives from Him, we will begin to show signs of life, that we’re drawing life from Him. He is the living stone. As we come to Christ, we are living stones, being added on to Him as the cornerstone, and the church expands, because living stones are being added. Yes, please?

Participant: I think it’s ironic that stones are made from dirt, and we were made from dust.

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Bruce: Amen. The important thing is this. I’ll leave you with this, and we’ll pick it up next week. You are a precious, living stone when you come to Christ. You are precious in God’s sight, because just as He chose Christ before the foundation of the world to be the cornerstone, that is the cornerstone by which you and I are being added to that holy, spiritual temple, which is that house which is being built. You and I are now the living stones. You are a living stone, being added to the spiritual house, not one made with gold and material and wonderful things, but human beings who are alive because they have come to Christ.

And who are the priesthood? First of all, those who are coming to Christ, and secondly, those who have a common identity in Him. And the common identity is this: you are a living stone! You’re alive because of Christ! Yes, please?

Participant: Bruce, you talked about three things before, about coming to Him, the priesthood of those that come to Him, are conformed to Him, and what was the third one?

Bruce: Those who have a common identity with Him. We’ll pick up on that in future weeks, a common identity. We’ll look at that. Yes, Bob?

Bob: A question. You talk about this growth in our salvation, which sounds like a progressive thing. When do we make the transition from that state to a living stone, which is a permanent part of the foundation?

Bruce: That’s the Holy Spirit’s job to answer that. I don’t know that. I can’t tell that about a person. All I’m saying is, a baby is healthy when he has a what? Hunger! A Christian is healthy when he has a hunger! That’s the analogy. I think that’s how you have to evaluate it. That’s part of the fruit. It’s having a hunger for the Word.

Now, as Don mentioned, some people deny that attending church is necessary. They are saying that it isn’t necessary. Now notice this. A detached stone is nothing but what? Rubble. The church is critical, because that is what you are being built into. If you’re not attached to the church, you’re not a living stone; you are rubble. Living stones, which are attached to one another, have mutual contact with each other. And thus we begin to support one another, and begin to build a common identity, and that is where we take on the common identity of Christ. If you want to get involved in something that is eternal, give yourself to two things, to the sufficiency of Scripture, and the glory of building up the local church. Those are the two things that will last forever.

Let us pray. Father, You for the clarity of Your word that You have written through the apostle Peter. We thank You for the Holy Spirit’s inspiration in his writing. Father, this is sufficient for us to understand our role, as part of the living stones of the holy temple that is being built by the Holy Spirit. Father, help us to recognize that we are precious, not because of what we do, but because of who You are. Our preciousness is found in You, not in ourselves, because You have made us, chose us, to be living stones in which You are glorifying Yourself. And, Father, may God be glorified, when we find that we are most happy in Christ Jesus. And may it be so, for Jesus’ sake. And all the Brave Men said, “Amen.”