

An Overview

Remember Who You Are

(2)

FIRST Peter 2 gives a unique picture of God's children. Three words illustrate the major thoughts of this chapter: "priest," "pilgrim," and "pattern." "Priest" is suggestive of a high privilege (2:5, 9). "Pilgrim" conveys the thought of future potential and present peril (2:11, 12). The word "pattern" does not appear in this form in the English translations, but the idea of the word is present. The Christian finds his pattern in Christ (2:21-24). With these three words, we can sum up much of this chapter as we answer the question, "Who is a Christian anyway?"

A CHRISTIAN IS A PRIEST OF GOD (2:1-10)

Growing Children in God's Family

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

Peter begins by looking back to our being begotten again by the Word that lives and abides forever (1:25). Since we have been brought to new life, we are to put off malice, hypocrisy, and evil speakings, and to desire the spiritual nourishment that is necessary for growth.

"That by it you may grow" is the object of "long for the pure milk of the Word" and "putting aside all malice and all guile and hypocrisy and all slander."

For growth to take place we have to lay aside the evil traits of sin. "Malice" is from a broad term which means "all evil." "All guile" means, of course, "deceit." "Hypocrisy" is the

homage vice pays to virtue. "Evil speakings" comes from a term which literally means "to speak down about." It has in it the idea of disparagement. The preposition *kala*, which means down, is part of this word. All of this must be put aside. Growth is possible only in the right kind of atmosphere. The soil must be prepared.

Colossians 3 and Ephesians 4 speak of stripping away envy and malice and putting evil speaking out of the mouth. Therefore, the idea of the renunciation of evil traits is characteristic of the New Testament.

The phrase "long for the pure milk of the Word" employs a word which means an intense longing. God's child has a yearning, a burning, for the Word. The daily need of our lives is met only by living in the Word. Newborn babes need the spiritual milk of the Word.

Of the New Testament writers, Peter particularly emphasizes growth. He later says, "But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18). Second Peter 1:5-12 enumerates what we have come to call the Christian graces,

... applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge; and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness; and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, Christian love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. ...

Peter holds before us the grandeur of growth—the splendor, beauty, and thrill of becoming more and more like the Savior.

A gospel preacher told of visiting a medical respiratory center in Houston, Texas. He over-

heard a little six-year-old boy—a wheelchair victim for most of his life—being questioned by a visitor. He was asked, “How long have you been in the wheelchair?” The little fellow said, “Off and on for about four years.” The man said, “You have been in it about all your life, haven’t you?” The little fellow grinned and said, “I ain’t been here all my life yet, mister.”

I think also of the New Englander who was asked, “Have you lived here all your life?” He said, “Not yet.” You are not to stay on the low plateau all your life. You must press on to higher ground.

In Venice, in little St. Mark’s Square, stands a remarkable statue in which the sculptor has skillfully portrayed a great horse. To the beholder, he is a muscular, almost moving stallion. The rider is poised and in control. All of that power is under his command—his feet are firmly in the stirrups, the baton of command is in his hand, the reins are tightly gripped. One observer who has come back to that statue during various times through the years has observed that the horse, though appearing so real and lifelike that you would expect him to bound down from the pedestal, was always in the same position. This writer then made the further observation that this is characteristic of non-growing Christians. Whenever you see them, they are essentially at the same point!

Living Stones in God’s House

Peter now introduces the stone chosen of God but rejected by men. He alludes to three Old Testament quotations: Isaiah 28:16, Psalms 118:22, and Isaiah 8:14. All three quotations point to Jesus as being rejected by men.

And coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected by men, but choice and precious in the sight of God, you 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. For 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.” This 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,” and, “A stone of stumbling and a rock of offense”; for they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this doom they were also appointed (2:4-8).

Thus, the great spiritual edifice is built upon

Jesus Christ. Though He has been rejected by men, He is the stone elect of God.

Christians themselves are also stones. Peter describes them as “living” stones. “Living” stands in contrast to those who were dead in trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:1). Christians have been made alive in Christ (Ephesians 2:1-10).

Ephesians 2:18-22 elaborates upon the figure of the church as the temple of God, a habitation of God through the Spirit, built upon the foundation of the prophets and apostles. Paul and Peter shake hands, as it were, describing the church as a great spiritual building made up of Christians as living stones.

In ancient Sparta, a leader boasted of the Spartan wall protecting the city. Travelers came to view the city, but they saw no wall at all. They saw no stones, no brick, no mortar, no visible, tangible wall around the city. Finally, the leader explained: “Every soldier in the Spartan army is a rock. Each one is a stone—solid, strong, standing together—forming an invincible wall protecting Sparta.” When he spoke of the wall of Sparta, he did not mean a wall that you could touch or see, but a wall that was made up of living men who had committed themselves to protect Sparta. Even so, the church is made up of living stones.

Holy Priests in God’s Temple

From the metaphor of the building of the temple, Peter now moves to those who officiate in the temple, the holy priesthood.

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for 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 (2:9, 10).

If we are ever to do what we ought to do, we must be what He wants us to be. Twice in this chapter Peter affirms that Christians are part of the priesthood (2:5, 9).

Years ago, while flying from Denver to Dallas, I engaged in a conversation with a person who was greatly disturbed about the rules that his particular religious group had made about their priesthood. They had excluded some, this individual believed, altogether unjustly from the priesthood. I took his grievance as a starting point to simply say, “Did you know that a chap-

ter in the New Testament makes it clear that all Christians, all believers, are in the priesthood?" That came as a surprise to him and we began to look at 1 Peter 2:5, 9.

Peter says, "You . . . are . . . a holy priesthood" (2:5), "a royal priesthood" (2:9). Under the old covenant, the office of king and priest were kept distinctly separate. In 1 Samuel 13, when Saul presumed to offer a sacrifice, when he usurped the priestly prerogative, Samuel rebuked him. In fact, the very first indication that Saul and his kingdom would ultimately fall comes in this chapter, but in Zechariah 6:13, a clearly messianic passage, Jesus is described as a priest upon a throne. Here is a kingly priest. Here is one who officiates as high priest, but who rules and reigns upon a throne. This royal priesthood also comes to be characteristic of Jesus' followers.

Peter's description of Christians is almost too great, too good, too wonderful for us to fully apprehend. We are described as a kingly, royal priesthood. As our Lord is a king and a priest, those who follow Him become a part of a royal priesthood.

Remember who you are: You are an elect race; you are a royal priesthood; you are a holy nation; you are a chosen people. The word *laos* is used about two hundred times in the New Testament. The English word *laity* comes from it, but the *laity* is the whole church of the Lord. Ephesians 1:11 uses the word *kleros* from which the English word *clergy* comes. It is translated "heritage" or "inheritance." God's heritage is the church, the whole church. God's people are God's laity. This truth has important implications because it simply means that all of us are to minister and all of us enjoy the privileges of the elect race, the royal priesthood.

A CHRISTIAN IS A PILGRIM (2:11-13)

Scattered Pilgrims

Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts, which wage war against the soul. Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may on account of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation. Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution: whether to a king as the one in authority (2:11-13).

As Peter turns to the pilgrim concept, his words remind us of songs we often sing: "Here We Are But Straying Pilgrims"; "To Canaan's Land I'm on My Way"; "I Am a Pilgrim and I Am a Stranger." These songs contain the idea that we are moving on. Our existence here is a temporary, transitory experience. Ours is a kind of nomadic life in a hostile land. Our eyes and hearts are fixed on a better land.

The words of verse 11—"aliens" and "strangers"—signify an important concept.

This world is not my home,
I'm just a passing through.
My treasures are laid up
Somewhere beyond the blue.
The angels beckon me
From heaven's open door.
And I can't feel at home
In this world anymore.

Peter should not be understood to say that this life ought to be lived in a state of non-involvement, a kind of monastic existence behind cloistered walls. We are not to be so other-worldly that we are of no earthly use. A better viewpoint is expressed in the question, "What on earth are you doing for heaven's sake?"

As we make our way through this world, however, we ought to have an abiding conviction that this is not our natural habitat. This is a proving ground, a period of probation; this is a time to be *in* the world but not *of* the world. Certainly this is a time for involvement, but it is also a time to recognize that this world is not my destiny.

Peter uses the word *paroikos*, a word which describes one who does not have the right of citizenship, one who is an alien. In a sense, we are in a hostile environment. John said, "See how great a love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God; and such we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him" (1 John 3:1). Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world . . ." (John 18:36).

We ought to involve ourselves with people and with this world. A removed existence, cut off from life, is not taught in the Word. We are the light of the world and the light needs to be penetrating the darkness. We are the salt of the earth, and salt preserves and irritates, but salt

needs to make contact with that which needs to be preserved. However, the idea of a stranger or a pilgrim is a safeguard keeping us back from being victimized by the material things which at best would simply be accessories to travel.

Submissive Citizens

Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution: whether to a king as the one in authority; or to governors as sent by Him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right. For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men. Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bondslaves of God. Honor all men; love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king (2:13-17).

First Peter 2:13-17 in many respects parallels Romans 13:1-7. For the most part, though not exclusively, responsibility to civil government is discussed. The late R. C. Bell summed up the Christian's responsibility from 1 Peter 2 and Romans 13:1-7 under three headings: *pray*, *pay*, and *obey*. We are to *pray* for kings and all that are in authority (1 Timothy 2:1, 2). We are to *pay*: "Render therefore unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and unto God things that are God's." We are to *obey*: "Submit to these powers that be because they are ordained of God."

Notice verse 17: "Honor all men; love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king." This admonition is much needed. Remember 1 Peter was written in the sixties of the first century. Nero was emperor. The Christian is to pray, pay, and obey even when a Nero is on the throne. We are to "honor all men" for all are made in the image of God no matter how they might be marred or scarred by sin.

First Peter 2:18-20 gives an injunction to slaves. We are to suffer for the Lord's sake. We are to be willing to bear reproaches for the Lord's cause. We are here to serve, not to be served.

Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable. For this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a man bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly. For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God (2:18-20).

A CHRISTIAN IS A PERSON WITH A PATTERN (2:20-25)

Who are we? We are priests. We have a high privilege. We are pilgrims going on to a better land. We have potential, but we also face peril because we must do battle with fleshly lusts which war against the soul. In the exercise of these privileges and in the fulfillment of these obligations, what is really the great example or pattern? It is the Lord Jesus who suffered wrong. He is Jehovah's suffering servant who went to the cross.

For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God. For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously; and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed. For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls (2:20-25).

To appreciate what Peter says, we have to recall Isaiah's words:

But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed. All of us like sheep have gone astray, . . . (Isaiah 53:5, 6).

The phrase "all of us like sheep have gone astray" is repeated by Peter in 2:25.

As Peter urges upon his readers a realization of a high privilege, he reminds us of our present situation. Like Israel of old, we are going through a wilderness. We are strangers and pilgrims and may suffer wrongfully, but we have a great pattern to follow.

The question "What would Jesus do?" is the question we need to be raising at every juncture. The question cannot be avoided. He left us an example and we should follow in His steps. In the Old and New Testaments we have the comforting, strengthening picture of the One who shepherds the sheep. He laid down His life for the sheep; He bore our sins in His body upon the tree.

What does the sheep have to do in order to be saved, salvaged, and rescued by the Shepherd? We have a part to play (Galatians 5:6), but in the final analysis the role of the sheep is to allow the Shepherd to save him. We do not bootstrap our way to glory. We, like sheep, are characterized by foolishness and foibles; yet the Good Shepherd left us an example. Like sheep, who at best must surrender and follow the Shepherd, we need to give ourselves to Him.

CONCLUSION

Who are you anyway? You are a living stone in a great spiritual building. You are a part of a royal, kingly, regal priesthood. You are an elect race, a chosen generation. You are the people of God.

I hope your heart has been thrilled and filled with privileges that are undeserved and unmerited but blood-bought and completely ours. Many of our spiritual problems, our faith problems,

our moral and ethical problems, would be resolved if we could ever come to see just who we are and what we have in Jesus.

All of the great Old Testament concepts come to full fruition in God's people today. We are to show forth the praises, the excellencies of Him who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light. That means evangelism, but that also means our very lives are to show forth His praises and excellent grace.

You are priests, you are pilgrims, and you have a great pattern. He died for us, leaving us an example that we should follow in His steps. He is that Shepherd who unerringly can bring us into the eternal fold and make us His forever. He is the only one who can enable us to say, "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil; for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me" (Psalms 23:4).

—Avon Malone

Applying Scripture to Life

Looking Back

Looking back it seems to me
All the griefs which had to be
Left me, when the pain was
o'er,
Richer than I'd been before;
And by every hurt and blow
Suffered in the Long-ago,
I can face the world today
In a bigger, kindlier way.
Pleasure doesn't make the man,
Life requires a sterner plan.
He who never knows a care
Never learns what he can bear.

Paradox Lifestyle

Christians are to live a lifestyle that is a paradox. A. W. Tozer perhaps summed it up best when he wrote that a Christian "feels supreme love for One whom he has never seen,

talks familiarly every day to Someone he cannot see, expects to go to heaven on the virtue of Another, empties himself in order to be full, admits he is wrong so he can be declared right, goes down in order to get up, is strongest when he is weakest, richest when he is poorest, and happiest when he feels worst. He dies so he can live, forsakes in order to have, gives away so he can keep, sees the invisible, hears the inaudible, and knows that which passeth knowledge. And all the while he may be confounding his critics by his unbelievable practicality."

Bound to Win

A little more persistence, courage, vim,

Success will down o'er failure's
cloudy rim.
Then take this honey for the
bitterest cup;
There is no failure, save in giving up.
No real fall, so long as one still tries,
For seeming set-backs make the strong man wise.
There's no defeat, in truth, save from within;
Unless you're beaten there, you're bound to win.

William Barrett,
The Supplementary Bible

The Lot of Greatness

Crowns are cast in crucibles. As someone observed, scars are the price of scepters, and grief has always been the lot of greatness.