

I PETER

I. Be Holy In All Your Behavior With A Holiness Like God's Holiness

A. **I Peter 2:4-8** . . . And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God, [5] 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. [6] For this is contained in Scripture: "Behold, I Lay in Zion a choice stone, a precious corner stone, and he who believes in Him will not be disappointed." [7] 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," [8] 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.

B. Pray

II. The Making of the Church

A. **I Peter 2:4** . . . And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God.

1. Jesus Christ is the foundation, the head, and the life of the church. Without Christ, there is no church. And we, individually, are not part of His church if we are not part of Christ. And we are not part of Christ if we have not come to Him His prescribed way.

a. Now when I say we must come to Christ, Christ's way, I mean that we do not become part of the church by joining a church or attending a church or getting married in a church or even being baptized in a church.

b. We become part of the church by humbly repenting, trusting in Christ's saving work to free us from the penalty of sin and the enslaving power of sin, depending on Christ's work to put us in good standing with God legally while doing our part to be in good standing with God practically, and growing in love for God and man.

2. I also want to remind us that God's intention from the beginning is to have a family or a community of people who not only belong to Him, but who want to be His children and want to love Him and want to love each other and who want to willingly submit to Him so as to live according to His will.

B. I Peter 2:5a . . . 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.

1. Here in **verse 5**, God begins to make it clear that our salvation is far more than a private, personal affair. We are not only being saved to become part of the church, we are being saved for God's sake and the sake of His eternal kingdom.
2. Consider this progression of events: In coming to Christ, we are born again, and in being born again, we gain the life of Christ within. And when we Christians, who have Christ's life surging through us, are united in a single entity, that is, the church, we become a community of living stones which is – and yet is still being built into – the dwelling place of God.
 - a. In other words, as the church universal, we are both the family of God and the living Holy of Holies in which God dwells in all His glory.
 - b. But there is more, because we are more than God's family and God's dwelling place here on the earth. We are, as individuals and as a community of believers, priests unto our God, with all the privileges and responsibilities of the Priesthood – which includes serving God, representing God to those around us, entering into and therefore experiencing God's indescribable presence, enjoying intimate fellowship with God – all while pursuing and maintaining a life worthy of and therefore able to continue participating in the privileges and responsibilities of the Priesthood.
 - c. Beyond all this, the church is a mysterious combination of humanity and divinity, a visible group of people yet a spiritual community, openly fulfilling its responsibilities yet empowered and given gifts and other graces that are hidden from human view, many individual members yet one single body, meeting in local settings yet universal by nature, focused on building up the body of Christ where they are yet zealously missions minded, being a disciple yet making disciples, being the light of the world yet like the moon only reflecting the light of the Son, living in this world yet like pilgrims – longing for their true home, having earthly leaders yet all are subordinate to the one Head – our Lord Jesus Christ, the stench of death to those who are rejecting Christ yet the aroma of life to those who are being saved, and an object of scorn among unbelievers yet the dearly loved bride of Christ.

- d. And just to encourage you a bit further, the church is called the Body of Christ, the Bride of Christ, the wife of God, a people for God's own possession, the sheepfold, God's field, God's vineyard, God's building, the household of God, the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth, the dwelling place of God, a holy temple, and the Holy City.
 - e. What I hope we see with all that I have been saying is that the church is not a building made of brick or wood or any other earthly material. It is a living organism made up of God's people who gain their life and strength and ability from their source of life, Jesus Christ. So when you look around this room, do not see the walls and the ceiling and the carpet and the chairs as the church, see the people. Do not think of the place we meet or the time we meet or our style of worship or the minister or the programs as the church, think of the people who belong to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ – for they are the church.
3. Now there are two combinations of words here in **verse 5** that require our attention if we are going to approach being what God intends for the Body of Christ to be like in this world. They are “**spiritual house**” and “**holy priesthood**.”
4. **Spiritual house:** To understand the significance of God's people being built into a spiritual house, we must begin by recalling that this spiritual house is being built on the foundation of the Living Stone, Jesus Christ, and the building material is made up of millions and possibly even billions of living stones. Therefore, the church of Jesus Christ is not an inanimate structure, it is a living organism.
- a. In other words, we are not being built into a building made of wood or brick with all kinds of good worship and teaching and prayer meetings and Sunday School and youth groups and other activities going on inside. That is not the CHURCH, even though it may be where the church meets and it may include some of the things some of the members of the church do when they gather in one place. The church is a spiritual house.
 - b. In other words, the church is that community of believers, that group of living stones who have the life of Christ surging through their veins, and who are united together by God in one salvation, one Holy Spirit, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all (**Ephesians 4:4-5**).
 - c. And when Paul says God is in all, one of the things he means is that God's chosen sanctuary, His modern day Holy of Holies, His

dwelling place here on the earth, is His people united together as the church.

- d. Paul makes this clear in his letter to the church at Ephesus when he says: “So then you are . . . fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, [20] having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, [21] in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, [22] in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit” (**Ephesians 2:19-22**).
 - e. The point here is that the church is not physical, but mystical. It is not made of inanimate building material, but with all those who were once dead in their sin but have now been made alive together with Christ (**Colossians 2:13**). It's life does not come from itself or from anything outside of itself, but from within, from the living Christ who lives within each member who makes up the total membership of the Body of Christ. And it's membership is not made up of the collective membership of the different churches and various denominations scattered down through history and around the world. Its membership is made up of those who belong to Christ. In other words, the church is a spiritual house, both universally and locally – for Jesus said that where two or three have gathered together in His name, He is there in their midst (**Matthew 18:20**).
 - f. Now before looking at the two words, holy priesthood, I want to remind us that these two statements do not stand alone. They have intention to them, and their intention is to make it clear that the church's responsibility is that of offering up spiritual sacrifices that are acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. If you can keep this in mind, it will add further clarity to how the holy priesthood goes together with the spiritual house.
5. **Holy priesthood:** These two words form a title, and though this title comes with marvelous privileges, it also comes with formidable responsibilities that are intended to bring about a specific result.
- a. And it is because this title comes with formidable responsibilities, that I want to pass along this warning.
 - (1) If we think that we can have this title and enjoy its privileges without giving proper attention to the responsibilities that come with the title, we will be more foolish than King Louis 16th, who because of his selfish life-style and inattention to

his responsibilities as King, lost his head to an angry mob who suffered under his self-serving rule.

- (2) Now the reason I have said we would be more foolish than King Louis 16th if we fail to take our responsibility seriously is because we will not face an angry mob, but a Holy God!
- (3) So please bear in mind that this title, “Holy Priesthood” is not about us or about the advantages we have by being in Christ Jesus or because of who we are in Christ. This title, though it comes with wonderful privileges and precious blessings, is about serving God and pleasing Him and honoring Him according to what He wills and says.

b. Notice that the title begins with the word “HOLY.” This word defines what kind of priests we are to be. In other words, we who are members of the true church are to be holy in heart, mind, and behavior.

- (1) This should come as no surprise, for God brought up this need for holiness back in **I Peter 1:15**, where He said we are to be holy in all our behavior as He is holy.
- (2) Now it is likely that we understood those words in **1:15** to be addressed to us individually, and that is good, for each one of us ought to take these words to heart. But individual holiness is only part of what God is looking for in His people. The other part is corporate or church wide holiness.
- (3) The point here is that it is God’s expectation, and therefore it ought to be our expectation, that we together are to be holy – which means we together must value holiness, pursue holiness, and put forth a commendable effort to be holy as a community of believers.

c. Following the word HOLY, is the word “PRIESTHOOD.” The choice of this word over the word “PRIESTS” is important. You see, the word priests speaks of individuals whereas the word priesthood speaks of a body or inclusive group made up of individual priests. In other words, to be a holy priesthood is not about our individual role as priests, but rather our corporate, all-inclusive role as priests who are working in a unified way to accomplish God’s intended purposes for His holy priesthood.

6. Now that we see we are being built into a spiritual house so that we can corporately function as a Holy Priesthood, what are the privileges that come with this position? Surely it includes being provided for and protected by God, day by day (**Matthew 6:25-33, 16:18**). But most

of all it includes living and working in the presence of God so as to have a settled confidence of His presence, the comfort of His presence, and an ongoing joy of fellowship with Him.

7. This brings us to the responsibilities that God has placed on us as His Holy Priesthood – or holy community of priests. And the last half of **I Peter 2:5** clearly states what our responsibility is –

C. **I Peter 2:5b** . . . 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.**

1. In other words, as God's holy priesthood, we – certainly individually, but even more so as an entire community – we have the responsibility to offer **spiritual sacrifices** that are **acceptable** to God, day in and day out – just as the OT priests were to offer acceptable sacrifices to God, seven days a week, and 365 days a year.
2. Before looking at the kind of sacrifices that are acceptable, I want to make very clear that what is acceptable to God is not determined by our modern day theologians or Divinity School professors or Bible School teachers, or by the popular teaching of the day, or by the best selling literature, and certainly not by the immature, less-than-serious Christians who make all sorts of claims as to what is acceptable to God.
3. What is acceptable to God is determined by God, and God alone. And though He reveals what is acceptable in His word, it will not be found by a selective reading of His word, but by a comprehensive, thoughtful, fearful, and prayerful reading of His word. (Consider Hebrews 10:24-27 as a popular example of selective reading.)
4. There are plenty of individual scriptures and longer scripture portions that make clear what is acceptable to God. Consider this short, incomplete list as a starting point.
 - a. Acceptable offerings from us, that is, the church in this building, are first of all holy lives (**Romans 12:1; Psalm 15:1-5, 24:3-4**) and transformed minds (**Romans 12:2, Philippians 2:5**), such that we are clean and becoming cleaner both inwardly and outwardly (**Matthew 23:25-26**).
 - b. Acceptable offerings include public and often repeated thanksgiving, praise to our God, and singing songs and hymns that glorify God and proclaim His greatness (**Psalm 50:14; 107:22; 116:17; Hebrews 13:15**).

- c. Acceptable offerings include keeping our word, especially our promises (vows) to God (**Psalm 50:14**). [*Remember to think corporately here as well as individually.*]
- d. Acceptable offerings include confidently calling on God in prayer (**Psalm 116:17**).
- e. Acceptable offerings include a broken spirit over sin that expresses itself in a broken and a contrite heart (**Psalm 51:17**). This means that when we sin, we feel heart-broken and want to cry, not because of what our sin has done to us, but because of how we have treated God by sinning. Now imagine what our times together might be like if we all felt this way over our sin. And imagine what it might be like if we felt this way over any sin that is committed by any of us within this local community of believers, or even in the larger Body of Christ.
- f. And my last example of what is acceptable to God comes from **Hebrews 13:16** . . . And do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.

III. Conclusion

- A. In summary, those who are born again, who belong to God through Jesus Christ, make up the true church. The rest of the attenders are pretenders, tares sown among the wheat by God's enemy (**Matthew 13:25-30**). And though the tares are imperceptible to most of us until the wheat bears its fruit, the day is coming when God, himself, will separate His people from the tares (**Matthew 7:21-23**).
- B. If we are to be part of the true, universal, eternal church, we must enter through the narrow gate and according to the requirements of our Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ, which include repentance, faith, and the serious pursuit of a godly life. Therefore, the proof that we are genuine members of the Body of Christ is seen in our changed life, our ongoing choices and behavior, a life that is lived for God, a longing for a pure heart and further spiritual growth, brokenness and even weeping over sin, a confident faith, treasuring God above all else, and a growing longing to experience intimate fellowship with God.
- C. But if we enter right, we become part of those who are being built into a spiritual house in order to offer acceptable spiritual sacrifices to God.