

## I PETER

The Stench of Death / The Aroma of Life

January 20, 2013

- 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. Remember – this is about the church, not individual Christians or specific instances of evangelism, but the church and what the church is intended to be to the world around us.
  - A. **I Peter 2:6a** . . . **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."
    1. A few Sundays back we looked at **verse 4**, and talked about how the church has been built, and is still being built on Jesus Christ. We talked about Jesus being choice and precious to God. And we talked about how God's purpose in proclaiming Christ as choice and precious was to affirm His true worth in a world where He has been denigrated, rejected, and considered worthless by so many.
    2. Here in **verse 6**, God is once again proclaiming Christ as choice and precious. But this time God is encouraging us to confidently believe that when we get to the end of our lives, we will have NO regrets and NO disappointments at having believed in Jesus. But before getting to that, let's look at the significance of Christ being the choice stone and precious cornerstone to the structural uniqueness of the church. And this is a uniqueness that separates it from all other organizations.
      - a. **First** of all, the church is made up of the people of God, that is, those who belong to God through Jesus Christ. And though you don't need to hear this, let me remind you that those who belong

to God have repented, put their trust in Christ for salvation, and then moved on from there to pursue a holy life and seek an ever growing union with God and deepening fellowship with God.

- b. **Second**, the head of the church is Jesus Christ. And though He is not visible to us today, the church submits to His will, lives according to His word, and serves Him.
- c. **Third**, the life and power of the church comes from its head, Jesus Christ, through the presence, power, and work of the Holy Spirit. This makes the church an earthly yet divinely living organism.
- d. **Fourth**, the purpose of the church is fourfold: (1) to be God's dwelling place on the earth, (2) to display the glory of God by being holy just as God is holy, (3) to build up the body of Christ both spiritually and numerically, and (4) to be God's salt and light in the world.
- e. **Fifth**, the supreme law of the church is the law of love, beginning with loving God above all else, and including loving others as ourselves – from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith (**I Timothy 1:5**).
- f. **And sixth**, the church is marked by great diversity, such as location, ethnicity, language, culture, gender, age, education, affiliation (denominations), styles of worship, forms of church government, gifts of the Spirit, and particular or even peculiar ways of living out the Christian life.
  - (1) Such diversity is God's doing, and though we sometimes make it the enemy of unity within the church, it isn't. The primary enemies are the devil and human pride. And together they produce such things as abuses of power, self-righteousness, theological disagreements, discrimination, and every other evil that separates God's people.
  - (2) It is for this reason that Paul said in **Ephesians 4:1-3** . . .  
"Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

B. **I Peter 2:6b** . . . 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.**"

1. This part of the verse – which begins with the word BEHOLD and ends with the word DISAPPOINTED comes from **Isaiah 26:16**, and it is also found in **Romans 9:33** and **Romans 10:11-13**.
2. The word translated by the NASB as “**disappointed**” could also be translated as “**put to shame**” or “**disgraced.**” In other words, believing in and living according to Jesus Christ will not leave us, one day, feeling disappointed or ashamed for having done so. You will not come to the end of your life and look back with regret, disappointment, or shame for having trusted in and having lived each day according to the words and will of Jesus.
3. In fact, those who trust in Jesus and live accordingly will have many recurring moments when they look back a month or a year or a number of years and feel great joy and extreme gratitude at having responded with repentance, faith, and the pursuit of a godly life to the convicting work of the Holy Spirit and the call of God to salvation.
  - a. Now it may be that along the way, some believers will experience the kind of hard times that powerfully challenge their faith and test their commitment. They may even complain a bit here and there while passing through such times.
  - b. Yet when the trusting Christian and the true church come to the end of such times, they will look at God with humble gratitude for having worked it all out for good, and for having brought about significant spiritual progress through the hard time.
  - c. In other words, as our precious corner stone, Jesus can be trusted to bring us, individually and corporately, to the end of our lives free of any disappointment or shame for having trusted Him.
4. However, trusting Jesus as individuals is somewhat harder in real life than in theory or claim. Our tendency is to be double-minded – trusting in Jesus for some things while also trusting in earthly, temporal things like democracy, education, stable employment, financial security, savings, investments, property, and insurance in its varied forms (i.e., house, car, life, health, S.S., nursing home).
  - a. I bring this up only because any trust in earthly things that surpasses or competes with our trust in Jesus and obedience to His will, will one day leave us disappointed and ashamed for having been so foolish with having placed our trust in these earthly things.
  - b. David said, “I have been young and now I am old, yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken or his descendants begging bread” (**Psalm 37:25**). And Jesus followed up David’s words with: “But

seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you” (**Matthew 6:33**). When God’s people, both individually and corporately, trust in God enough to live according to these words, they will never be disappointed for having done so.

5. Now if it is challenging for individuals to trust Jesus in the way that puts their lives in His hands, you can imagine what it is like for the church, locally and universally, to consistently live by faith. Local gatherings of the Body of Christ, just like individuals, are often tempted to trust in things other than Jesus, and other than His word, and other than His will, for such things as numerical growth, increased giving, and a ready supply of Christian workers.
  - a. In my opinion, it is this kind of misplaced trust that has motivated some in the church to water down the gospel so that repentance on the front side and a serious pursuit of godliness on the back side are no longer an inseparable part of the gospel message.
  - b. It is this kind of misplaced trust that has prompted some churches to remove greed and covetousness from the list of sins the church publicly opposes and actively disciplines.
  - c. In the pursuit of greater numbers and increased giving, some have trusted in an exaggerated presentation of God’s love and grace so as to make those in attendance feel spiritually safe even though they deal with their sin lightly and indecisively.
  - d. In a hunger for riveting or entertaining preaching, some have trusted in pastors who are great preachers, but whose pride, home life, and private lives are unworthy of their position.
  - e. And it is this kind of misplaced trust which promotes tolerance or silent acceptance of such things as unscripturally justified divorce, living together outside the marriage covenant, immorality of all kinds – from internet pornography to homosexuality, broken relationships due to unresolved conflict, taking fellow Christians to court, and the continuation of immature Christianity among those who, by now, ought to be teachers.
6. Though many in the church may be well-meaning and therefore blind to their misplaced trust, it will not change the outcome. One day, they will be disappointed and ashamed for having been so foolish. And for those of us who do not come to our senses in this life, we will know the sadness of disappointment and shame at the judgment seat of Christ. But by then, it will be too late to remedy.
7. Which brings us back to Christ, who, as the choice stone and precious corner stone of the church, is worthy of our complete trust.

C. **I Peter 2:7a . . . This precious value, then, is for you who believe.**

1. There are two ways to take this statement. **First**, the treasures found and gained by being in Christ are only for those who believe in Him. And **second**, only those who believe will truly and rightly value this precious treasure.
2. In our current religious culture, faith, itself, is sometimes promoted as the means to one's desired end. In other words, it is said that if you have enough faith, God will do as you ask. The error of this teaching is that it treats faith as an entity in and of itself – as if faith can be separated from how you live, and as if God must bow to your use of faith.
  - a. The reality is, what we believe is demonstrated day after day by how we live. In other words, we live each moment of the day according to what we believe or believe in.
  - b. Therefore, those who believe in Jesus live, day by day, according to the example, the teaching, the will, and the works of Jesus. To do otherwise is to claim one belief system while living according to a different belief system. And should you claim to believe in Jesus while living contrary to Jesus, you are living according to a competing belief system.
3. Therefore, it is faith in Jesus that brings us into the treasures and riches of the Christian life – which is why Jesus is the precious value.
4. And in what ways is Jesus this precious value? Since there is no single, one sentence answer, let me try and give you a broader picture that includes some of what it means.
  - a. Jesus Christ, himself, is our God, our Savior, our Lord, our Husband, our food and drink, our provider and protector, our healer, our helper, and our coming King.
  - b. Being spiritually broken, morally impoverished, and without hope of being anything other than what we are, Jesus is our hope for spiritual healing and spiritual growth. He is our hope for putting to death the unholy desires in our flesh, for bringing an end to the evil in our thoughts, for cleaning out the impurities in our heart, and for making measurable, God-pleasing progress toward being holy as God is holy, in all our behavior.
  - c. Having grown up separated from Christ, excluded from the community of believers, and strangers to the covenants of promise, and being without God in the world, Jesus is the One who, out of love for His Father and love for us, redeems us, renews us, transforms us, reconciles us to God, and then stands at God's

right hand to intercede for us when Satan comes to accuse us of having sinned. And Christ does all this so we can know God personally and intimately while yet in this life.

5. Jesus is such a precious value that the scripture says that those who believe in Him will sell all to obtain Him (**Matthew 13:44**).

D. **I Peter 2:7b-8 . . . 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.

1. Just as Christ and His church are precious to those who believe in Him, so Christ and His church are offensive, and therefore a convenient excuse for those who reject Christ and His church. And though some issues have shades of grey, this issue is black or white. Either Christ and His church are the aroma of life or they are the stench of death. Let me explain it this way.
2. It is probable that some unbelievers reject Christ and His church because of the hypocrisy in the church – and this is just wrong because it exposes the gospel and the church as being spiritually compromised, and it brings undeserved dishonor to God.
3. However, far more reject Christ and the church because of the holiness required to belong to Christ and to be a Church member in good standing with the teachings of the Bible. Unbelievers may point to hypocrisy as their excuse, but the demands of holiness is their reason.
  - a. Now if you do not believe holiness is the reason, then consider these two questions:
    - (1) What part of the scriptures and teachings of the orthodox church are facing the strongest assaults in our day by those who are rejecting Christ and are unhappy with the church?
    - (2) What part of the message is being compromised within the church in an effort to help outsiders feel comfortable with the church and to get more people into the church?
  - b. The answer to both questions is the same – God's standard of holiness, which the true church has always held as the only acceptable standard for individual Christians and for the church as a whole.
4. God affirms what I just told you when He says that those who reject Jesus and His church stumble over the cornerstone and are offended by the Rock because they prefer to be disobedient to the word. In other words, the holiness of mind, heart, and life required by Christ and

His church is the reason so many reject Christ and His church. Their reasoning is simple, they want to continue going their own, sinful way.

5. Now I assume most of us would say that the rejecting unbelievers are those outside the church. However, the OT quote used here in **I Peter** is rightly understood to refer to those within the organized church, including those who are serious about the practice of their religion while at the same time living a life contrary to faith in Jesus.
  - a. The Jewish religious leaders of Isaiah's time and Jesus' time are common examples of serious-minded religious people who have great zeal for their religious practices, but little or no zeal for the holiness of life required by God for inclusion in God's family.
  - b. This was such a problem in Jesus' day that He said that unless our righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, we will not enter the kingdom of heaven (**Matthew 5:20**).
6. It is probable that the scribes and Pharisees of our day are those within organized religion who know about God, worship God, read God's word, pray to God, give their tithes and offerings to the church, defend their theology, and teach others to do the same.
  - a. Yet they live a double life, in that they reject God's standard of holiness in the home, in the workplace, in their private, hidden lives, and in their thoughts and heart.
  - b. In **Matthew 7:23** Jesus said that these church attendees who think of themselves as being in good standing with God, will one day be shocked when they hear Jesus say: "I never knew you. Depart from Me, you who practiced lawlessness."

### III. Conclusion

- A. In **Matthew 21:42-44**, Jesus said, "Did you never read in the Scriptures, 'The stone which the builders rejected, this became the chief corner stone; this came about from the Lord, and it is marvelous in our eyes'? [43] Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from [those rejecting this stone] and given to a people, producing the fruit of it. [44] [Therefore], he who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls, it will scatter him like dust."
- B. May we as individual Christians live by faith in Jesus, and may we as a church help each other live by faith in Jesus so that we can come to the end of life free from any and all disappointment and shame for having done otherwise.