

The Books of 1 and 2 Peter, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 3: A Chosen People and Holy Priesthood

1 Peter 2:1–12

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

First Peter 2:1–12 is one of the richest ecclesiological passages in the New Testament, and the doctrinal stakes are high. Peter takes the titles God gave Israel at Sinai and applies them to the church: chosen race, royal priesthood, holy nation, God's own possession. Be ready to teach the priesthood of all believers, the church as the spiritual temple of God, and Christ as the rejected-yet-chosen cornerstone of Psalm 118. This is also a key text for showing that the church is the people of God in the present age, built on Christ and reigning with Him now, which guards against pushing the kingdom off into a future earthly age. The growth Peter describes is growth "into salvation," which fits our understanding that salvation is a walk to be completed, not merely a transaction left in the past.

At the same time, the passage is deeply formational. Peter begins with the relational poisons that destroy a church from within (malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, slander) and with the hunger for the Word that marks a healthy soul. He ends with the watching world and the way honorable conduct silences slander and leads outsiders to glorify God. The doctrine of who we are is meant to produce a particular kind of community and a particular kind of witness. Help students feel both the dignity of their identity and the weight of living it out in public.

So aim to leave students marveling that people the world counted as nobodies have become God's temple and royal priests, and convicted that such a people cannot harbor the old poisons or starve themselves of the Word. The disciple we are forming knows who he is in Christ, hungers to grow, takes his place as a load-bearing stone in God's house, and lives so honorably that even his critics end up praising God.

Question 1

Student Question:

Peter tells believers to put away "all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander" and to long for "the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation" (vv. 1–2). What is the relationship between putting off these sins and growing in Christ, and what does it mean to "grow up into salvation"?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Notice Peter's order: put off, then long for. Before he tells them to feed, he tells them to clear away "all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander." These are not random vices; they are precisely the sins that destroy fellowship. They are relational poisons, the things

that travel between members of the same body and rot it from inside. A church cannot grow while it is feeding on one another.

Then comes the appetite. “Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk.” The point of the image is craving. A healthy infant does not need to be persuaded to eat; the hunger is built in. Peter assumes that genuine spiritual life produces a genuine spiritual appetite, and that the loss of appetite is a symptom worth taking seriously.

Weigh the phrase “grow up into salvation.” Peter speaks of salvation as something we grow up into, a process with a destination, not merely a past event. The same Word that gave us new birth (1:23) now feeds us toward maturity. This fits the whole shape of biblical salvation: begun in obedient faith, continued in growth, completed at Christ’s revelation.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The relational sins that destroy Christian fellowship (malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, slander)
- Spiritual appetite as a sign of spiritual health
- The Word as the food that grows the believer (Matthew 4:4)
- Salvation as a process “grown up into,” not only a past transaction

Discussion Prompts

- Which of the five poisons in verse 1 most threatens your congregation’s health?
- What does it tell us when the appetite for the Word fades?
- What does it mean to you that we “grow up into” salvation?

Question 2

Student Question:

Peter assumes that a healthy Christian craves the Word the way an infant craves milk. What does your current appetite for Scripture reveal about the health of your soul, and what one habit could you change this week to feed that hunger?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question turns the diagnostic inward. Appetite is one of the most reliable readings of spiritual health, and unlike feelings, it is hard to fake. A believer who has lost all hunger for Scripture, prayer, and the assembly is showing a symptom that should not be ignored.

Help students locate the cause without shame. Appetite is dulled by spiritual junk food (a steady diet of entertainment and noise), by unconfessed sin that makes us avoid God’s voice, by busyness, and by simple neglect that lets a habit quietly die. Naming the specific cause is more useful than a general resolution to read more.

Then offer a concrete, doable step. Appetite often returns through small, repeated acts of obedience: a set time, a manageable portion, the Word read slowly and prayed back to God, the table of fellowship rejoined. Encourage one change small enough to actually keep.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Appetite for the Word as a diagnostic of the soul's condition
- The dulling effect of spiritual junk food and unconfessed sin
- Spiritual disciplines as the ordinary means God uses to restore hunger
- Consistency over intensity in feeding the soul

Discussion Prompts

- What is your honest appetite for Scripture in this season, and why?
- What one thing is most dulling your hunger to grow?
- What small, keepable habit could you begin this week to feed your soul?

Question 3

Student Question:

Peter describes Jesus as "a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious," and the cornerstone on which everything is built (vv. 4, 6–7). What does it mean that Christ is the cornerstone, and why does Peter stress that the stone the builders rejected became the most important stone of all?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Set the scene of the cornerstone. In ancient construction the cornerstone was laid first and set the line for every other stone; the whole building's alignment depended on it. Peter, quoting Isaiah 28:16 and Psalm 118:22, says Christ is that stone, chosen and precious to God, the One on whom the entire spiritual house is squared.

Sit with the paradox: "rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious." The builders, the religious leaders who should have recognized Him, threw this stone aside, and God made the rejected stone the most important one of all. This is the gospel pattern in stone: the crucified and despised Christ is the exalted Lord, and what the world discards God exalts.

Draw out the assurance Peter attaches: "Whoever believes in him will not be put to shame." To build your life on this cornerstone is to build on the one foundation that cannot be moved. Every other foundation, however respectable, is a stone the world is proud of that will not bear the weight of a soul.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Christ as the chosen, precious cornerstone of the church (Isaiah 28:16; Psalm 118:22)

- The pattern of rejection-then-exaltation in the gospel (Acts 4:11)
- Christ as the one foundation that cannot be moved (1 Corinthians 3:11)
- Faith in Christ as the guarantee against ultimate shame

Discussion Prompts

- Why is it significant that the rejected stone became the cornerstone?
- What does it mean to align your whole life to Christ as the cornerstone?
- Where are you building on a stone the world admires rather than on Christ?

Question 4

Student Question:

Peter says the same stone is precious to believers but “a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense” to those who disobey (vv. 7–8). Where in your own life are you tempted to find Christ’s lordship inconvenient or offensive rather than precious, and what would it mean to treasure Him there?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question takes Peter’s sober warning and makes it personal. The same Christ who is “precious” to believers is “a stone of stumbling” to those who disobey. The dividing line is response: the stone is either the foundation you build on or the rock you trip over.

Help students be honest about the places where Christ’s lordship feels inconvenient rather than precious. It might be His teaching on money, on forgiveness, on sexual purity, on the tongue, on submission to His Word where it crosses our preferences. We rarely reject Christ outright; we more often find a particular command an offense and quietly set it aside.

Then call them to treasure Him precisely there. To find Christ precious is not merely to admire Him in general but to prize His authority at the exact point where it costs us. Ask each student to name the one area where Christ is more stumbling-block than cornerstone, and to bring it under His lordship.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The same Christ as cornerstone to the believing and stumbling-stone to the disobedient
- Disobedience, not mere ignorance, as the root of stumbling (v. 8)
- The lordship of Christ over every area, including the inconvenient
- Treasuring Christ as prizing His authority where it costs us

Discussion Prompts

- Where do you find Christ’s lordship most inconvenient right now?
- What is the difference between admiring Christ and treasuring Him?

- How would treasuring Him in that hard area change your week?

Question 5

Student Question:

Peter calls believers “living stones” being “built up as a spiritual house” and “a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (vv. 5). What does it mean that the church is a temple and every Christian a priest, and how does this shape our understanding of worship and the church?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Peter piles two images together: the church is a building and every believer is a priest. As a building, we are “living stones... being built up as a spiritual house,” a temple not of marble but of people, with the Spirit of God dwelling among us (Ephesians 2:21–22). The presence of God no longer rests in a building made with hands; it rests in a people.

As priests, every Christian has direct access to God and a ministry to offer. Under the old covenant only a select tribe could serve at the altar; under the new covenant Peter says all of us are “a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices.” Those sacrifices are our praise, our prayers, our surrendered lives, our generosity (Romans 12:1; Hebrews 13:15–16). This is the priesthood of all believers.

Guard the balance carefully. The priesthood of all believers means every Christian has access and offers worship; it does not erase the order God established for the church, in which He assigns the work of elders, deacons, and public teaching according to His pattern. Universal priesthood and ordered ministry are both biblical and not in conflict.

Apply it to worship. Because we are priests offering spiritual sacrifices “through Jesus Christ,” worship is never a spectator event. Whether in the assembly on the Lord’s Day or in the quiet sacrifice of an obedient week, every believer is actively bringing something to God through Christ our great High Priest.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The church as the spiritual temple where God dwells (Ephesians 2:19–22)
- The priesthood of all believers with direct access to God (Hebrews 4:14–16)
- Spiritual sacrifices: praise, prayer, surrendered lives, generosity (Romans 12:1; Hebrews 13:15–16)
- Universal priesthood alongside God’s ordered ministry in the church
- Worship offered to God “through Jesus Christ,” never apart from Him

Discussion Prompts

- What does it change to know your body of believers is God’s temple?

- What spiritual sacrifices are you offering as a priest of God?
- How does seeing yourself as a priest reshape your view of worship?

Question 6

Student Question:

If you are part of a “spiritual house” being built together, what does it look like for you to be a connected, load-bearing stone rather than a stone sitting off by itself? Where is God calling you into deeper commitment to His people?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question presses the building image into commitment. A stone that sits off by itself bears no load and holds nothing up. Peter’s picture assumes that believers are joined together, each one set into the wall, each one bearing weight and being borne.

Name the modern temptation toward detached, consumer faith, the believer who attends occasionally, keeps relationships shallow, and never lets himself be needed or known. Peter’s image leaves no room for it. A living stone out of the wall is doing nothing the Builder intends.

Call students toward one concrete step of deeper commitment: joining a class, serving a need, opening their home, committing to a person or ministry, simply being present and reliable. Ask where God is calling each of them from the edge of the church into the load-bearing wall.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The interdependence of believers in the body and building of Christ (1 Corinthians 12)
- The danger of detached, consumer Christianity
- Commitment to the local congregation as the normal Christian life
- Every member as a contributing, load-bearing part

Discussion Prompts

- Where are you currently more of a detached stone than a connected one?
- What load could you help bear in your congregation?
- What one step toward deeper commitment is God asking of you?

Question 7

Student Question:

Peter stacks up the titles God once gave Israel and gives them to the church: “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession” (v. 9). What does each of these titles teach about who the church is, and what is the stated purpose of this calling, “that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you”?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Walk through the four titles deliberately, because each carries weight. “A chosen race” means a people God Himself has called into being, not a club we joined. “A royal priesthood” unites two offices, kings and priests, in a people who both reign with Christ and serve at His altar. “A holy nation” means a people set apart, citizens of a kingdom not of this world. “A people for his own possession” means we belong to God in the most personal way, His treasured possession.

Stress that these are the very titles God gave Israel at Sinai (Exodus 19:5–6), now applied to the church. This locates the church as the people of God in the present age, the continuation and fulfillment of God’s purpose to have a holy people for Himself. The kingdom is not waiting for a future earthly reign; the King is enthroned and His royal priesthood is gathered now.

Do not miss the stated purpose: “that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” Election here is for mission, not privilege. We were chosen not to hoard the light but to declare the One who shone it on us. The grandeur of our identity exists for the praise of God and the reaching of the lost.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The church as God’s chosen people, inheriting Israel’s Sinai titles (Exodus 19:5–6)
- The royal priesthood: reigning with Christ and serving God now
- The church as the present-age people and kingdom of God, with Christ reigning (Colossians 1:13)
- Election for mission and witness, not mere privilege
- The purpose of our calling: to proclaim God’s excellencies

Discussion Prompts

- Which of the four titles most surprises you when applied to you?
- How does it change things to see the church as God’s present-age people?
- If we were chosen to proclaim His excellencies, who needs to hear them from you?

Question 8

Student Question:

Peter says you were “once not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy” (v. 10). Spend a moment remembering your own “once” and “now.” How does recalling the mercy you have received change the way you carry yourself and treat others this week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verse 10 is a quiet thunderclap. Drawing on Hosea, Peter tells these former pagans, “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.” There was a line in their lives, a before and an after, and the hinge was the mercy of God.

Invite real remembering. Every Christian has a “once,” the life before Christ found us, and a “now,” the life mercy made. Forgetting the “once” breeds pride and harshness; remembering it keeps us tender. The mercied are meant to be merciful (Matthew 18:33).

Make the application relational. A person who keeps the mercy he received in view treats others differently: more patient with sinners, slower to condemn, quicker to forgive, gentler with the struggling. Ask students how a fresh memory of their own mercy would change one specific relationship this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The decisive before-and-after of God’s mercy (Hosea 1:9–10; 2:23)
- Remembering our former state as a guard against pride
- The mercied called to be merciful (Matthew 18:21–35)
- Identity in Christ rooted in received mercy, not personal merit

Discussion Prompts

- What was your “once,” and what is your “now”?
- How does remembering your own mercy soften you toward others?
- Whom is God calling you to treat with the mercy you have received?

Question 9

Student Question:

Peter urges believers, as “sojourners and exiles, to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul,” and to keep their conduct honorable so that outsiders “may see your good deeds and glorify God” (vv. 11–12). How does Peter connect personal holiness, our identity as exiles, and the church’s witness to the watching world, and what does this teach about the purpose of a holy life?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the doctrinal and pastoral hinge of the lesson, where identity becomes witness. Peter calls believers “sojourners and exiles” and on that basis urges them to “abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.” Holiness is framed as wartime conduct; the desires of the flesh are not harmless indulgences but enemy combatants against the soul.

Notice the outward turn in verse 12: “Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.” The watching world is part of the equation. Slandered Christians are not to

answer with slander but with such visibly good lives that accusation collapses and outsiders are drawn to God.

Tie the three threads together: identity, holiness, and witness. Because we are exiles who belong to God (identity), we say no to the passions that war against the soul (holiness), and we live so honorably in public that even our critics end up glorifying God (witness). Holiness is never merely private; it is the church's most powerful argument to a skeptical world.

Apply it concretely. The "day of visitation" may point to the day a watching neighbor's heart is finally opened, or to the final day of reckoning; either way the call is the same, to live now in such a way that our conduct preaches when our words are dismissed. Ask students where their public life either commends or contradicts the gospel they profess.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The Christian as sojourner and exile whose conduct is wartime conduct
- Fleshly passions as active enemies of the soul, not harmless indulgences
- Holiness as the church's witness to a watching, often hostile world
- Good works that silence slander and lead outsiders to glorify God (Matthew 5:16)
- The unity of identity, holiness, and mission in the Christian life

Discussion Prompts

- How does seeing fleshly desires as enemies of your soul change how you fight them?
- Where does your public conduct most commend, or contradict, the gospel?
- Who is watching your life right now, and what are they seeing?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across the whole passage. Peter moves from putting away old poisons, to feeding on the Word, to the cornerstone, to the church as a chosen people and holy priesthood, to a watching world. Name one specific way Jesus is forming you through these verses. What single truth from 1 Peter 2:1–12 do you most need to carry into this week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Gather the lesson's sweep. Peter has moved from the poisons that must be put away, to the milk that must be craved, to the cornerstone we are built on, to the staggering identity of the church, to the watching world. Every piece serves one aim: a holy people who know who they are and show it.

Ask for specific formation. After a passage this rich, the temptation is to admire the architecture and live unchanged. Press each student to name one truth to carry and one place it will touch this week.

Close by holding the two opening pictures together one more time: hungry infants and a holy temple. We are growing and we are already God's dwelling place. Send students out hungry to grow and humbled by who, in Christ, they already are.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The integration of identity, growth, and witness
- The church as God's present-age temple and royal priesthood
- Ongoing formation into the image of Christ through the Word

Discussion Prompts

- Which single truth from this passage do you most need this week?
- Where do you sense Jesus forming you through 1 Peter 2:1-12?
- What is one concrete way your identity in Christ will shape a choice this week?