

The Books of 1 and 2 Peter

Lesson 3: A Chosen People and Holy Priesthood -- 1 Peter 2:1-12

Every newborn knows how to do one thing without being taught. It cries for milk. There is no lecture, no instruction manual, no negotiation. The hunger is wired in. Peter reaches for that picture to describe what should be happening in a young church: "Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation." He is not insulting these believers by calling them babies. He is telling them that healthy new life always comes with an appetite, and that the surest sign something is alive is that it is hungry to grow.

But before he hands them the milk, he tells them what to set down. "Put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander." These are the things that curdle a community, the quiet poisons that pass between people who sit in the same pews and sing the same songs. Peter knows that a church can be doctrinally correct and still be slowly killing itself with gossip and grudges. So he clears the table first, then sets out the food.

Then the images begin to pile up, each one more dignifying than the last. They are coming to a living Stone, rejected by men but chosen and precious to God. They are themselves living stones, being built into a spiritual house. They are a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices. And then Peter gathers up the grand titles God once gave to Israel at Sinai and lays them on a roomful of ex-pagans and former nobodies: "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession." People the world stepped over have become the dwelling place of God.

Hold those two pictures together as you read: hungry infants and a holy temple. We are still growing, still putting away the old poisons, still longing for the milk, and at the very same time we are already a chosen people built on the cornerstone that the builders threw away. Peter wants these scattered exiles, and us, to know who we have become, and then to live like it out in the open, keeping our conduct so honorable among the watching world that even our accusers end up glorifying God.

Group Discussion: Peter says God's people, who were once "not a people," have now become "God's people" who have "received mercy" (v. 10). Why do you think it matters so much that the church understands its identity before it tries to live out its conduct? How might a wrong or fuzzy sense of who we are in Christ show up in the way a congregation actually treats one another?

Personal Reflection: Peter tells believers to "long for the pure spiritual milk" like newborns crave milk (v. 2). Be honest about your own appetite for the Word and for growth. Is it a real hunger right now, or has it faded? What is one thing dulling your appetite, and what might restore it?

Read 1 Peter 2:1-12

Study Questions

1. 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”?
2. 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?
3. 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?
4. 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?
5. 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?
6. 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?
7. 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”?
8. 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?
9. 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?
10. 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?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Psalm 118:22-23, the stone the builders rejected becoming the cornerstone; Exodus 19:5-6, Israel called to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation; Ephesians 2:19-22, being built together into a dwelling place for God; Hosea 1:9-10 and 2:23, the people who were “not my people” becoming God’s people; Romans 12:1-2, offering ourselves as a living sacrifice in spiritual worship