

Growing Up
1 Peter 2: 4-8

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Thus far in 1 Peter, we've been given a good idea of his overall purpose. As we have seen, this letter was written to Christian churches in the second half of the first century to give them hope in the midst of rising trial and persecution. Peter begins doing that by rooting their hope in a rock-solid foundation: the imperishable, undefiled, and unfading inheritance that is theirs by virtue of God's grace and love alone. With such a sure salvation that no one could undo or take from us, Peter then urges us on to live as those who have been born again! He called us in chapter 1 to be holy as he is holy, to love one another with sincere brotherly love, and to long for the pure spiritual milk — God's word — that by it we might grow up into salvation, the maturity of faith. It's that picture of what it looks like to "grow up" that he continues in the passage before us. However, before we hear God's word, let's begin by asking his help in prayer.

As we come to you, Almighty God, create in us a longing for your word. As it is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, would you pierce us where we must be convicted, heal us where we need comfort and hope, and conform us to the truth of this imperishable truth. As it is sown in our hearts today, we ask that your Spirit would bless it to bear fruit in our lives to the glory of your name. Amen.

Hear the word of the Lord, beginning at verse 4 of 1 Peter 2:

[“As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it stands in Scripture:](#)

‘Behold, I am Laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.’

So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe,

‘The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,’

And

‘A stone of stumbling and a rock of offense.’

They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.”

Here ends the reading of God’s word.

When I was a small child, I guess there was just something about my personality that made my relatives wonder what might become of me when I grew up. My mother will tell you what her mother repeatedly would say about me as a boy, that I would grow up to be either a prisoner, a politician, or a preacher. I’m not precisely sure what that was supposed to mean, but of course, it’s funny now looking back on that given the calling God has placed on my life.

It’s something we all naturally wonder about, what it will look like to grow up. As a kid, you go through waves and phases of interest in various professions before you finally find what you’re meant to do. As adults with kids, you sit and wonder how the child before you will grow up one day into an adult. But the reality is that for every Christian regardless of profession or calling, your truest and highest calling is to grow up — not into a doctor, a lawyer, a successful real estate agent — but into Christ. The verse right before our passage urges this very thing, that we are to long for the pure spiritual milk of the word of God that by it we might grow up into salvation, to grow up into Christ and to more clearly bear his image. But, as you might have seen, this passage is actually about two paths, the two paths and destinies that define and divide all of humanity. There are those who

have been born again and are called to grow up into Christ, but there are also those who continue in sin and scales and grow in hardness and deadness of heart to their own eternal harm. There is no middle ground with Christ, the choice is between the two.

Following the natural flow of the text, we'll first examine the path of faith that we'll find in verses 4-7a, the reality that those who have been born again are called to grow up into Christ. As we can see in these verses, Peter describes the new identity and purpose of one born again with three pictures or metaphors: as living stones being built into the New Temple, as a holy priesthood, and as those offering spiritual sacrifices. Each one of these pictures is deep in meaning, but before we deal with each individually, I want you to take note of how each of these concepts isn't a one-time thing. Growing up physically is a process that takes place over stages and phases spanning decades. How much more, then, is the process of growing into spiritual maturity helpfully pictured as a process, a progressive reality that encompasses all of life? Whether you're sitting here as a seven-year-old believer or as a ninety-seven-year-old saint, the Lord isn't done with you. Being built into this spiritual house, offering sacrifices pleasing to God through Christ, and coming to Jesus; all of these are continuous realities.

With that being said, the very first metaphor Peter uses for those who are born again and strive to grow into maturity, into Christ, is that we are to be living stones built up into a new spiritual house, the New Temple. While the Temple metaphor applies to all three of these pictures, this first example has in mind the very building, the structure into which we are now, spiritually, made a part. The Temple is the place where God's Spirit is pleased to dwell and where people come to meet with God. Don't miss what an honor that should be for each one of us!

The first implication to draw from this picture is that, if it isn't already evident, our being living stones makes no sense whatsoever without an understanding of *the* living stone, the cornerstone who is Jesus Christ. Your identity and call to be a living stone in the New Temple is rooted in Christ first, not in you. To say it another way, as all three of these examples make plain, you cannot know yourself — who you were truly meant to be — until you know God. How can you hope to be a living stone without a vital relationship with the

cornerstone? How can you hope to be a priest to God with no knowledge of the Great High Priest? How can you hope to offer spiritual sacrifices to God without a deep love for the one who offered himself as the perfect sacrifice? Your identity, growing up in Christ, is firstly *in Christ* and *defined by Christ*.

Connected tightly with this is what we must take note of concerning how Christ, the living stone, is described: “rejected by men, but in the sight of God chosen and precious.” It’s crucial we notice this given that we can expect no better in this life than the experience of our Savior. We’re told he was rejected by the builders, for he was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. Yet, in God’s sight, in his Father’s eyes, he was exactly who he truly was: chosen and precious. This is true of you, living stones. Do not expect to be wise in the eyes of the world, do not expect worldly acclaim or success, and do not expect that your Christian beliefs will gain you credit in the public square. If you are rejected, exiled, isolated, or othered, then rejoice. For so they treated your Savior. Yet remember the most important thing, that your Father sees you as you are: chosen and precious. And this is not because of your merit, your strength, your intelligence, your devotion. No, it’s all of grace and all of Christ, our living hope, our cornerstone. Know for certain that whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.

Now, before we move on to the second picture of growing up into Christ, take note also of the corporate aspect of the picture Peter is drawing. How many stones does it take to form a Temple? Many! Your calling to be living stones and to form this spiritual house is incomplete if it neglects the people sitting in the pew next to you. While we are said to be temples to God individually because the Spirit dwells within us, the predominating picture here and in the New Testament is a corporate reality. In other words, the Bible has no category for a rogue, freelance, do-it-yourself sort of Christian. If you desire to come to Christ, you must come to his bride, to the gathered body that is his Church. If you have been born again you have been called to grow up into Christ as living stones being built up together as a New Temple.

However, we are not only called to form the structure but we are also called to be the priesthood, the servants within the New Temple. Of course, you know

that the priesthood of the Old Testament was composed of the tribe of Levi. They were to form the priestly caste and would represent God's people in the tabernacle and later Temple in approaching his presence. This calling was a high calling and the act of approaching God in his house could be a dangerous thing which was why the priests, especially the High Priest on *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement, had to undergo various washings and offer various sacrifices. Yet, now that the Great High Priest has come and entered into the heavenly Holy of Holies — indeed, he still is said to intercede as such until he comes again — the priestly caste has been abolished and each believer is called to be a priest. That means that the work of the ministry, the work of spreading the gospel, the work of offering spiritual sacrifices as we'll discuss in a moment isn't the exclusive office of your pastors. Our role is not to do the religious work for you, it is to equip you to go out into the world, scattered as the Levites were scattered among the land, to be priests to God, representatives of God to the people and of the people to God. Do you grasp the honor of such a high calling? God has opened the way to himself. No longer does his wrath demand we be held back. No longer are we held back for our own protection. Christ, the Great High Priest, has torn the veil and has made us all priests. As we read in Hebrews 4:16, let us, then with confidence approach the throne of grace! Growing up in Christ, as those born again, is secondly pictured as embracing the noble calling of priests to boldly go before the very presence of God through Christ.

You may naturally wonder what you're supposed to do as a "holy priesthood," especially since the old sacrificial system has been done away with now that Christ has offered himself as *the* sacrifice, once for all time. That's where Peter's third metaphor comes in, that those who have been born again and are called to grow up into Christ are to offer up *spiritual* sacrifices as priests within the New Temple, of which we are a part. These spiritual sacrifices are discussed in numerous ways through the New Testament, so here are the main ones. As priests called to intercede for one another, we're told in Revelation 8:3-4 that the prayers of God's people are like a sacrifice of incense. Second, as those called to support the work of God's Church, we're told in Philippians 4:18 that our tithes and offerings are a pleasing sacrifice to God. Third, we find in Hebrews 13:15 that priestly worship, praise as the fruit of thankful lips is a sacrifice to the Lord. Finally, Paul summarizes our true sacrifice to God in Romans 12:1-2 as being

nothing less than ourselves, body and soul. As Christ, the Great High Priest offered up nothing less than himself to redeem us and set us apart as priests, now we offer ourselves up in whole-personed spiritual devotion. These are the sacrifices of born-again believers growing up into Christ, but remember that these are not sacrifices of obligation, they ought to be sacrifices of overflow! You might already be questioning how God could ever accept your prayers when so often your mind drifts, how he could accept your praise when very rarely do you feel placed on spiritual heights when you sing, how he could accept you as a whole-person sacrifice when you know you haven't loved him with heart, soul, mind, and strength and you've failed in loving your neighbor as yourself. Be encouraged; Peter says plainly that your sacrifices are accepted in God's sight *through Jesus Christ*. Not because of your perfect devotion, not because of your wisdom, nothing but through Jesus Christ who purifies our weak offerings and makes them beautiful in the Father's sight. So as a child brings dandelions to his parents purely out of love, bring your offerings to God. He has nobly called you as priests to offer spiritual sacrifices in his New Temple.

Much as we might be tempted to stop there, Peter does not. Verses 7 and 8 are here to acknowledge the reality that there are only two routes to follow, two destinies, two paths. To be born again and to grow up into Christ, or to remain in sin and scales, to dwell in deadness of heart, and to reject Christ. There are many who reject Christ outright by believing that religion is silly and infantile, a fairy tale for those who are afraid of the dark. They reject the cornerstone. There are many who stumble over Christ and are offended by his backward sexual morality, his regressive stances on marriage, and his repugnant views on hell to name a few major issues. They stumble over the stumbling block. There are those who disobey the word because, no matter what they may say about God, giving lip service to Jesus, they willingly choose another path and follow their heart's desires rather than the call to be born again.

All these, those who do not believe, Peter says do so because they were destined to do so. If that language sounds odd, that's okay. Christians disagree over how to handle this. But what I and many within church history have come to see here and in multiple other places in Scripture is the reality that God has chosen and set apart a people to save in Christ and the rest of humanity, who willingly and

freely reject him, he passes over to just judgment. To understand why this works together — human responsibility and divine sovereignty — we must grasp that every person, having willingly turned away from the God of life, has embraced sin and death. This is what each person deserves outside of God’s mercy. We have *all* rejected Christ in our hearts by worshipping idols, gods of our own making. We have *all* stumbled over Christ by our doubts. We have *all* disobeyed God’s word, no matter how holy one might become, this reality of indwelling sin remains. So, for those who have been born again, these two verses are not here to point outward and to draw our attention to the wicked “other” that hasn’t been enlightened. No, it ought to humble us. Your being remade into Christ, being called as living stones of the New Temple, priests to God offering spiritual sacrifices, is all of grace. Let that truth sink in and bring humility and compassion for the lost. For those who perhaps sit here now and have rejected Christ, or even just have desired to sit on the fence and live a good enough life to get into heaven, know this. The Lord is just as able to save you as he is for any person in this room, but there is no middle ground with him. You must either embrace and shelter under the cornerstone or you will, as Jesus himself said in Matthew 21, fall upon it and be crushed. Don’t put him off any longer. Don’t harden your heart anymore. This day, this hour has been given to you to turn to him. Won’t you heed the call to become who you were meant to be? Won’t you grow up into Christ?