

THE UNIVERSAL PRIESTHOOD: *An Exegesis of 1 Peter 2:1-10¹*

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Introduction

“Tell me a little about yourself.” When we hear that line from someone with whom we’re not well-acquainted we usually launch into something like this: “Well, I’m forty years old (or was that forty-one?), married to a beautiful woman, have two children; we live in North Mankato, which is right next to Mankato, MN, where I teach at Bethany Lutheran College....” Many factors come to mind when we think of who we are – our identity.

In his first letter, Peter continually reminds his readers of their identity. Rather than focus on inane worldly details, he zeroes in on what’s most important: our standing in the eyes of God, or our place in His kingdom.

The section under scrutiny bears this identification out especially through the use of contrast. Peter reminds his readers of who they were prior to being made part of God’s family, contrasting that non-status with the present reality of what God had made them. This was especially important for Peter’s readers as they compared themselves to the unbelievers around them, and as they fought to retain hope in what may have seemed like hopeless times.

Isagogical Comments

Authorship: The apostle Peter is clearly identified as the author of this letter (1:12). Additional internal and the external evidence point to his authorship, and there have not been serious challenges to it historically.

The date and place of writing: No date of writing is given by Peter, nor is there a link to any one specific historic event. It is clear that the recipients of the letter were undergoing some sort of persecution (1:6; 3:14; 4:12-16; 5:8-9³). Most likely this letter was composed during the early 60s AD. Emperor Nero reigned from AD 54-68 and instituted his persecution of the Christians in AD 64. However, the persecution to which Peter alludes in this letter was more likely verbal than physical (e.g., 4:14 - “If you are insulted now for the name of Christ, you are fortunate....”). Peter’s death in AD 67-8 precludes this letter being dated later than that time.

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² Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To God’s elect, strangers in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia....

³ 1:6 - In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. 3:14 - But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. "Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened." 4:12-16 - (12) Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. (13) But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. (14) If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. (15) If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. (16) However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name. 5:8-9 - (8) Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. (9) Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.

The identification of the place of writing is slightly more enigmatic. In 5:13 Peter states, "Your sister [church] in Babylon, chosen together [with you], greets you...." Many have taken "Babylon" to refer to Rome, using as additional evidence references in Revelation (e.g., 14:8; 16:19; 18:2⁴). Could Peter instead be referring to a region of Mesopotamia? Paul states in Galatians 2:9 that it was decided he and Barnabas were to work among the Gentiles, while James, Peter, and John were to work among the Jews. There were many Jews scattered in Mesopotamia, and some early Church writings make reference to Peter carrying out much work in the area. It may very well be that Peter wrote this letter from the vicinity of the geographical Babylon and not Rome.

The recipients: "[T]he elect sojourners scattered in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia" (1:1) are the Christians to whom Peter wrote. Both Jewish and Gentile Christians constituted these churches, but the Gentiles may have been more predominant (cf. 1:14; 2:9-10). However, it also appears that Peter expected his readers to have at least some knowledge of the Old Testament (which would suggest more of a Jewish audience). Pilgrims from these areas are also mentioned in Acts 2:9-11 (Pentecost). The churches addressed in Revelation 2-3 might also be included among the recipients.

The purpose: Peter states in 5:12, "Through Silas the faithful brother (as I consider [him]) I am writing to you briefly, encouraging and assuring that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it!" He also states in 2 Peter 3:1-2, "Dear friends, this is now the second letter I am writing to you. In both of them I stir up your pure minds by reminding you to think of the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets and of what the Lord and Savior commanded through your apostles" (NET). Therefore his purpose is twofold: (1) to give hope and strength to the Christians in the outer reaches of the empire; and (2) to add his own testimony to the truth of God's grace.

Context

This passage resides in the third major section of Peter's epistle. In 1:3-12 Peter had stressed to his readers that they were possessors of a sure hope, because their inheritance was in heaven. The second section, 1:13-25, addresses how to live with one another as co-heirs of this hope. In this third section, 2:1-10, Peter maintains that his readers are God's priests, and as such are boldly to proclaim their hope before the world in what they say and do.

Verses 1-3

- (1) Ἀποθέμενοι οὖν πᾶσαν κακίαν καὶ πάντα δόλον καὶ ὑποκρίσεις καὶ φθόνους καὶ πάσας καταλαλιᾶς,
(2) ὡς ἀρτιγέννητα βρέφη τὸ λογικὸν ἄδολον γάλα ἐπιποθήσατε, ἵνα ἐν αὐτῷ αὐξηθῆτε εἰς σωτηρίαν,
(3) εἰ ἐγεύσασθε ὅτι χρηστὸς ὁ κύριος.

Variants:

⁴ 14:8 - A second angel followed and said, "Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great, which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries." 16:19 - The great city split into three parts, and the cities of the nations collapsed. God remembered Babylon the Great and gave her the cup filled with the wine of the fury of his wrath. 18:2 - With a mighty voice he shouted: "Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great! She has become a home for demons and a haunt for every evil spirit, a haunt for every unclean and detestable bird."

(2) The Textus Receptus omits εἰς σωτηρίαν at the end of the verse. Attestation for its inclusion is overwhelming. (3) εἰ, supported by earlier witnesses, is replaced by the stronger form εἴπερ (if indeed, if after all, since) in later witnesses.

(1) Therefore, after you get rid of every evil and every guile and hypocrisy and jealousy and every slander, (2) as newborn babies long for the pure spiritual milk, in order that in it you may be caused to grow toward salvation, (3) if you have tasted that the Lord is good.

Vocables

Verse 1

Ἀποθέμενοι – aor. ptc. (circumstantial preliminary) fr. ἀποτίθημι; get rid of, lay aside, cease from
 οὖν – inferential conjunction (what follows is based on 1:13-25); therefore
 δόλον – m. acc.; bait for fish (lit.), guile, deceit by entrapment
 ὑποκρίσεις – f. acc.; delivery of a speech along with interpretive gestures and imitation (lit.),
 hypocrisy, pretense, giving impression of having certain motivations but not having them,
 deceit by false representation

Verse 2

ἀρτιγέννητα – nom. neut. pl. adj. (attributive ptc. form); just born, newborn
 ἐπιποθήσατε – aor. imprv. 2 pl. fr. ἐπιποθέω; long for, yearn for (after recognizing a lack)
 αὐξήθητε – aor. subj. pass. 2 pl. fr. αὐξάνω; you may be caused to grow, increase

Verse 3

ἐγεύσασθε – aor. mid. (dep.) 2 pl. fr. γεύομαι; you have tasted, partaken of, enjoyed
 χρηστὸς – adj. nom. (pred.); good, gracious

- ◆ With the inferential conjunction οὖν, Peter ties what he had just written in the previous section (1:13-25, especially 1:22-25⁵) to what he now states. His readers were to share their eternal hope with each other, primarily by loving one another. Their new status as ones who have been “born again” (1:23) does not make them able to do this on their own. They need a source of strength for this noble work. Peter now tells them what that source is.
- ◆ Prior to receiving that source of strength, Peter tells his readers what they must do first. Ἀποθέμενοι carries the connotation of “taking clothes off” and laying them aside (cf. Acts 7:58b⁶). What a striking visual picture of Peter’s instructions! Considering the evil attitudes Peter is about to mention, it is an appropriate term to use. The Christian is to have nothing at all to do with the forthcoming evil attitudes; he must separate himself from them completely.
- ◆ Peter’s list of the attitudes that are to be laid aside includes sins which stand in stark contrast to the Second Table of the Law; thus, they all mitigate against the Christian’s love for his

⁵ (22) Since you have consecrated yourselves in the sphere of the obedience of the truth resulting in genuine love for the brothers, love one another with a pure heart (23) since you have been born again, not by seed which perishes but which does not perish, through the living and abiding Word of God, (24) because all flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of the grass; the grass withers and the flowers falls off, (25) but the Word of the Lord remains forever. This is the word that was preached to you.

⁶ καὶ οἱ μάρτυρες ἀπέθεντο τὰ ἱμάτια αὐτῶν παρὰ τοὺς πόδας νεανίου καλουμένου Σαύλου –
 The witnesses had laid their outer clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul.

brother. The use of *πάσαν*, etc., emphasizes the all-inclusive nature of what is to be removed; *Make sure you get rid of all this stuff!* Peter exclaims. *Κακίαν* is the most general term of the list, focusing on moral depravity. *Δόλον* and *ὑποκρίσεις* both feature deceit, the former by entrapment and the latter by false representation. *Φθόνους* simply points out the jealousy one brother may have concerning another. Perhaps one brother is jealous of another and therefore acts deceitfully! Finally, such a brother might also speak disparagingly (*καταλαλιάς*) about the brother of whom he is jealous. All of these awful sins are to be gone!

- ◆ Peter characterizes his readers with an interesting simile in v.2: *ὡς ἀρτιγέννητα βρέφη*. Note the forward placement of this term for emphasis. Peter states his readers are like those who are “just born.” In 1:3 he had said they were given a “new birth” by God. In 1:23 Peter stated they were “born again” by God’s Word. Along those same lines Peter now says his readers are like newborn infants, helpless (note the lack of the article with *βρέφη*) and in need of nourishment.
- ◆ The type of nourishment needed comes first. There is only one specific nourishment (the article *το*,) Peter has in mind: *τὸ λογικὸν ἄδολον γάλα*. The adjective *λογικόν* stands in the emphatic position, and helps identify the “milk” as God’s Word. After all, what other “milk” could be spiritual? This is the same means by which the readers were born again (1:23) and which they had heard preached to them (1:25). The adjective *ἄδολον* further bolsters this identification since God’s Word definitely contains no guile.
- ◆ What is to be the readers’ attitude toward this marvelous milk? Mincing no words, Peter commands: *ἐπιποθήσατε!* *Do not just have a mild hunger for it*, Peter says. *Crave it!* The readers are to show that they cannot get enough of this spiritual milk, especially after they realize their lack of spiritual strength to unclot themselves from all the evil attitudes listed in v.1.
- ◆ The purpose clause closing this verse states why the readers are to crave the pure spiritual milk. The agent behind the passive *αὐξηθήτε* is, of course, God, since it is His Word which is being ingested. Through that milk God causes His infants to “grow toward salvation.” That is, this is the final goal of the Christian’s life. Thus Peter is restating the confident hope he so eloquently described in 1:3-7.⁷
- ◆ A simple conditional phrase ends the sentence in v.3. The *εἰ* could almost be translated as “since,” because the readers, if they examine their lives carefully, know that what follows is true. Peter quotes Ps. 34:8 to emphasize how gracious God is in what He has done for His children. Note the predicate nominative use of *χρηστός* to emphasize God’s goodness.

Commentary on verses 1-3

Do we, as Christians, love God? Certainly! Do we want to follow God joyfully? Certainly! But first we must get rid of what’s in the way: sin. No simple task, to be sure, and one that will not

⁷ (3) Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who in line with His great mercy caused us to be born again into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, (4) resulting in an inheritance which is incorruptible and undefiled, guarded in heaven for you, (5) the ones being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed at the last time, (6) in which you continue to be overjoyed, although now for a little while, if it is necessary, you be put to grief with various trials, (7) in order that the genuineness of your faith, which is more precious than gold which perishes though proved by testing by means of fire, may be found unto praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ....

be completed in this mortal life. But since “every evil and every guile and hypocrisy and jealousy and every slander” (v.1) are not acceptable to God, we will strive to put them aside through the constant and voracious use of the Means of Grace. Our craving for God’s Word and Sacraments is like an infant’s craving for milk. We will not adulterate God’s Word with our infantile opinions, because that would serve only to water down and perhaps stifle altogether the blessings God grants. We have seen and felt what God has done in our lives, that He has given us a “living hope” (1:3), and we want to continue to grow in that hope which the one and only true God gives.

Verses 4-7a

(4) πρὸς ὃν προσερχόμενοι λίθον ζῶντα ὑπὸ ἀνθρώπων μὲν ἀποδοκιμασμένον παρὰ δὲ θεῶ ἐκλεκτὸν ἔντιμον, (5) καὶ αὐτοὶ ὡς λίθοι ζῶντες οἰκοδομεῖσθε οἶκος πνευματικὸς εἰς ἱεράτευμα ἅγιον ἀνεύγκαι πνευματικὰς θυσίας εὐπροσδέκτους τῷ θεῷ διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. (6) διότι περιέχει ἐν γραφῇ, Ἰδοὺ τίθημι ἐν Σιών λίθον ἀκρογωνιαῖον ἐκλεκτὸν ἔντιμον καὶ ὁ πιστεύων ἐπ’ αὐτῷ οὐ μὴ κατασχυνθῆ. (7a) ὑμῖν οὖν ἡ τιμὴ τοῖς πιστεύουσιν...

Variants:

(5) The Textus Receptus, later uncials, and most minuscules omit εἰς. However, its inclusion is strongly attested.

(4) By coming to the One who is the living Stone, (who was) rejected by men but (considered) by God chosen (and) precious, (5) you yourselves are being built as living stones (into) a spiritual temple, in order that as holy priests you offer up spiritual sacrifices very acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. (6) Because it says in Scripture, “Behold, I lay in Zion a Cornerstone, chosen (and) precious, and the one who believes in Him will never be put to shame.” (7a) Therefore the honor is to you who believe...

Vocables

Verse 4

προσερχόμενοι – pres. ptc. (circumstantial manner) nom. m. 2 pl. fr. προσέρχομαι; by coming to
ἀποδοκιμασμένον – pf. pass. ptc. acc. m. sg. fr. ἀποδοκιμάζω; rejected, thought of as unworthy,
thrown out as a result of a serious test (lit.)

ἐκλεκτὸν – adj. acc. m. sg.; chosen, selected, excellent [cf. v.9 also!]

ἔντιμον – adj. acc. m. sg.; honored, esteemed, respected, precious

Verse 5

οἰκοδομεῖσθε – pres. pass. 2 pl. fr. οἰκοδομέω; are being built, established

ἱεράτευμα – acc. neut. sg.; priests, priesthood

ἀνεύγκαι – aor. inf. fr. ἀναφέρω; bring up, offer up

θυσίας – acc. f. pl.; sacrifices

εὐπροσδέκτους – adj. acc. f. pl.; very acceptable, welcome, pleasing

Verse 6

περιέχει – pres. 3 sg. fr. περιέχω; contains

ἀκρογωνιαῖον – acc. m. sg.; lying at the extreme angle (lit.); w/ λίθον, cornerstone, capstone

κατασχυνθῆ – aor. subj. pass. fr. κατασχύνω; will (never) be put to shame, be disappointed, be made a fool of

Excursus on the Structure of vs. 4-10

The structure of verses 4-10 can be seen as a chiasm, which combines the inner elements for a climax:

- A. Living Stone – rejected by men (4a)
- B. Living Stone – considered chosen and precious by God (4b)
- C. living stones – spiritual house (5a)
- C'. holy priests – spiritual sacrifices (5c)
- B'. Cornerstone – chosen and precious (6)
- A'. Stone rejected by men – stumble and fall (7-8)
- C. + C'. spiritual house – sacrifice of praise = people of God (9-10)

Thus the key point of this section is the center of the chiasm, verse 5. This element is also emphasized by the return to the point at the end of the section. This is not to detract from Peter's emphasis on Christ Jesus as the Living Stone, the Cornerstone. Rather, Peter continues to bolster his readers by reminding them of their identity as God's special people. Such an emphasis fits well with the overall theme of the letter.

- ◆ With the circumstantial participle (of manner) προσερχόμενοι Peter ties the upcoming thoughts to what was expressed in verse 3. That is, he continues to describe the actions of his readers. The participle is in the present tense, indicating that this is an ongoing action – the readers continue to do this. Peter's use of πρὸς reiterates the preposition of the participle and thus emphasizes the notion of directionality as well as its object.
- ◆ The object of πρὸς is worth noting. The relative pronoun ὃν is a tie-on; that is, an important point is about to be added to its antecedent. In this instance the antecedent is in verse 3: “the Lord.” The continued description of the Lord becomes the focal point in verse 4.
- ◆ Peter's description of the Lord begins by calling Him a λίθον ζῶντα. “Stone” stands in apposition to the relative pronoun. The lack of the article emphasizes the quality of this stone, that it is intended for building; it stands dressed and ready for construction. The attributive participle ζῶντα emphasizes a particular characteristic of the stone. On the surface it appears as though Peter creates a paradox – how can one have a stone that is alive? Obviously Peter personifies the stone to indicate he speaks of the Messiah, the One whom God raised from the dead (1:21). This stone is living because it wields the power of life (cf. below concerning the rescue out of darkness). Jesus made references to Himself as inanimate objects which were alive: e.g., “living water” (Jn 4:10) and “living bread” (Jn 6:51).
- ◆ The description of the Living Stone continues with a μὲν ... δὲ correlative phrase. On the one hand, the Stone was rejected by ἀνθρώπων. The lack of the article indicates the generic nature of the term; thus *all* mankind is implicated. The perfect tense of ἀποδοκιμασμένον emphasizes that this action has been occurring throughout every period of history. This participle is attributive, placing special emphasis on the rejection. On the other hand, the Stone is judged by God as ἐκλεκτὸν ἔντιμον. Peter also used “chosen” to describe his readers (1:1). Here the emphasis is on the fact that the Stone is of the highest quality. The lack of the conjunction

between the two adjectives emphasizes not only their presence, but also their sense. Thus τιμιον is not simply “honored,” but “precious.”

- ◆ Verse 5 begins with an intensive use of αὐτοῖς (bolstered by the ascensive use of καὶ) – “Yes, even you!” Here Peter shifts more to a communal perspective than was present in verse 4. That is, it is clear that even as individuals the readers come to the Living Stone. In verse 5, the initial emphasis is on what is happening to all the individual stones as a group.
- ◆ The main verb of verses 4-5 is οἰκοδομεῖσθε. The present tense indicates the ongoing nature of the building process which Jesus related to Peter in Matthew 16:18. Until the end of time, more and more living stones will be added to the building, the *Una Sancta*. God is obviously the agent behind the passive, since only He can add stones to His temple.
- ◆ Peter then refers to his readers as λίθοι ζῶντες. By doing so he does not equate them with *the* Living Stone (v.4), but looks ahead to verse 6 where he specifies Jesus as the Cornerstone. Thus, the living stones are built into the spiritual temple on *the* Living Stone. The attributive participle ζῶντες recalls the “living hope” the readers have through God (1:3).
- ◆ Peter uses another predicate nominative to describe the structure into which the living stones are placed. Οἶκος lacks the article, stressing the quality of incorporation or unity which is seen in this house. It could be translated either as “temple” or even “sanctuary.” Πνευματικός does not stand in contradistinction to “physical,” but relates the divine nature of the temple. This temple is supernatural, not just special!
- ◆ Why be built into such a sanctuary? The purpose clause beginning with εἰς explains. First, though, Peter ascribes a new identity to his readers: ἱεράτευμα ἅγιον. God’s people are priests, all members of the same priesthood. The lack of the article emphasizes the function of this priesthood as opposed to its form. That is, what these priests do as priests is the focus. The adjective ἅγιον stresses that the members of this priesthood have been set apart, or consecrated, for their service to God.
- ◆ The purpose of being built into a spiritual temple is so that the holy priests do what priests do: offer up sacrifices. The aorist tense of ἀνενέγκαι indicates that there is no question that this is their work. The content of their sacrifices is also logical: those being built into a spiritual temple should offer up spiritual sacrifices. Here πνευματικός might also emphasize the non-material nature of the sacrifices in addition to their divine nature. Because of the work of Christ, their praises and thanksgivings are acceptable to God (Heb 13:15⁸). The lack of the article with θυσίας stresses that they are willingly given to God, as is true of any sacrifice.
- ◆ God definitely appreciates the sacrifices of His priests. Peter says they are εὐπροσδέκτους to God. Note the compound nature of this word: εὖ (good) + προσ (to) + δέχομαι (receive). The sacrifices are particularly acceptable to God, and thus pleasing to Him. Peter also emphasizes why the sacrifices of the holy priests are so pleasing to God: διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. That is, God finds what His holy priests offer acceptable because of the work of the Great High Priest.

⁸ Through Jesus, then, let us always *bring to God a sacrifice of praise*, that is, *the fruit of our lips* praising His name (NET).

Apart from His redemptive work, the sacrifices of the priests would be worthless to God the holy Judge.

- ◆ At the beginning of verse 6 the conjunction διότι is used in a causal sense, indicating that what follows is the proof that what was just stated in verses 4 and 5 is true. Naturally Peter's proof comes from Scripture. The present tense of περιέχει indicates that what is about to be stated remains true for all times. Literally the word means "contains;" thus, "it is contained (in Scripture)." Peter quotes Isaiah 28:16. The first half of the quote follows neither the Hebrew nor the LXX exactly; he retains "stone" (both Heb. and LXX), "elect" (LXX), and "precious" (both). The emphasis in the first part of this quote is that this is not a chance event, since God Himself is the one laying or placing (τίθημι) the Stone. This Stone is further described by the appositive ἀκρογωνιάιον. While this word can be taken to mean "cornerstone" or "capstone," it is best to understand it as the cornerstone. The Cornerstone's location, ἐν Σιών, is among His people. Finally, Peter reiterates the description of the Stone from verse 4 as ἐκλεκτὸν ἔντιμον.
- ◆ The second half of the quote from Isaiah 28:16 follows the LXX rendering of the Hebrew: "the one who believes in Him will never be put to shame" versus "the one believing *in it* will not hurry [or flee]." The substantival participle πιστεύων demonstrates that the key characteristic of this person is his absolute trust. His trust is entirely (ἐπ') on the Cornerstone and nowhere else. Note also the use of litotes here, wherein the negative is stated in order to stress the positive to a high degree. Thus, God (the agent behind the passive καταισχυθῆ) will in no way make a fool of such a person. (God will not pull the rug out from under him after telling him to put his trust in the Stone and say, "Ha ha! I changed the rules! You lose!")
- ◆ Peter places the readers in the emphatic position in verse 7. He follows with the inferential conjunction οὖν, since what follows is true because of the preceding. In verse 5 Peter described the status of his readers as "holy priests." He now refers to this status as ἡ τιμή. This "honor" is best thought of as a state of great value. Of course, this value is not intrinsic but that which God has granted. The believers share in the honor granted Christ because of their relationship to Him - they are living stones being built on Him as the Cornerstone. Peter finally states that this honor is τοῖς πιστεύουσιν, reminding his readers of their deep trust in the Stone which God had placed among them.

Commentary on verses 4-7a

To his previous focus on how his readers are to be built up in God's Word, Peter now adds the result of such growth: they will be built as "living stones" on *the* "living Stone," the one whom they have already tasted and experienced as "good" (v.3). Not everyone, however, experiences Jesus as good, since many make a conscious choice to reject Him. But the Judge who matters makes the declaration that Jesus is the best! Furthermore, this Judge builds up His children into a marvelous structure, the Holy Christian Church. Peter's primary message (the center of the chiasm) is clear and compelling: (1) our present and future *status* before God is sure, because we are select stones of God's holy house; and (2) our *mission* is equally sure, because we are priests of the great High Priest. To what do we dedicate our lives as members of the priesthood of all believers? To the sacrificial service of the Lord! Luther comments that our spiritual service also includes preaching the Gospel:

Briefly stated, all this means [offering spiritual sacrifices] that the Gospel is preached. He who preaches the Gospel does all this. He slaughters the calf, namely, the carnal mind; he strangles the old Adam. For one must slay with the Gospel what is irrational in the flesh and blood. Then we let ourselves be sacrificed and put to death on the cross.⁹

Such spiritual offerings will always be acceptable to God because of Christ Jesus. God's construction of us as His priests is, indeed, an incredible honor. What higher honor than to have direct access to Him through Jesus?

Verses 7b-8

(7b) ὑμῖν οὖν ἡ τιμὴ τοῖς πιστεύουσιν, ἀπιστοῦσιν δὲ λίθος ὃν ἀπεδοκίμασαν οἱ οἰκοδομοῦντες, οὗτος ἐγενήθη εἰς κεφαλὴν γωνίας (8) καὶ λίθος προσκόμματος καὶ πέτρα σκανδάλου· οἱ προσκόπτουσιν τῷ λόγῳ ἀπειθοῦντες εἰς ὃ καὶ ἐτέθησαν.

(7b) ...but to those who do not believe the Stone which the builders rejected has become the Cornerstone (8) (and) a stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that is a death trap; who dash against the Word by being disobedient, for which they were destined.

Vocables

Verse 7b

ἀπεδοκίμασαν – aor. 3 pl. fr. ἀποδοκιμάζω; (cf. v. 4 for meaning)

εἰς κεφαλὴν γωνίας – prep. + fem. acc. sg. + fem. gen. sg. adj.; the head of the corner (lit.), Cornerstone; this construction (εἰς + acc.) is the LXX equivalent to a predicate nominative

Verse 8

προσκόμματος – gen. neut. sg.; stumbling, to cut against, something you bump into by accident (lit.)

σκανδάλου – gen. neut. sg.; trap stick, what causes people to fall, stumbling block, that which causes offense, death trap

προσκόπτουσιν – pres. act. 3 pl. fr. προσκόπτω; dash against, beat on, dash against, stumble

ἀπειθοῦντες – pres. ptc. nom. m. pl. fr. ἀπειθέω; disobey, are disobedient, reject

ἐτέθησαν – aor. pass. 3 pl. fr. τίθημι; they were placed, put, appointed, destined

- ◆ Peter's inference from the truth of v. 6 continues with a negative description in v. 7b. The attributive participle ἀπιστοῦσιν stands in direct contrast to the believers of v. 7a. The unbeliever's disbelief in the face of God's amazing love is the particular characteristic Peter wishes to stress.
- ◆ In keeping with the chiasmic structure present in vss. 4-10, Peter returns to a further description of the Cornerstone in vss. 7-8. An important added point about the Stone is noted

⁹ Martin Luther, *Luther's Works: The Catholic Epistles*, vol. 30 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1967), p. 54.

by the relative tie-on ο]n. This added information will center on the role of the Stone for the unbelievers. The information Peter adds about the Stone comes from Ps. 118:22.¹⁰

- ◆ The first part of Peter’s description of the Stone is that He is completely rejected (note the aorist tense of ἀπεδοκίμασαν). The rejecters literally threw Him out because He did not pass their test. Who are οἱ οἰκοδομοῦντες? When Jesus quoted Ps. 118:22 (as recorded in Mt. 21:42¹¹), He did so in the context of telling the ruling priests and elders that their rejection of Him would cause God to take His Kingdom from them and give it to others. Peter’s “builders,” however, would probably be better seen as unbelievers in general. One can look to the Jewish religious leaders as the ultimate unbelievers, since they possessed all the prophecies about the Messiah, saw them fulfilled in Jesus, and still rejected Him outright.
- ◆ Peter’s further describes the Stone as κεφαλὴν γωνίας. Literally this term means “head of the corner” (γωνίας is a descriptive genitive, indicating the kind of “head”). This is the same term used in the LXX in Ps. 118:22. The two ideas brought out by this term is that the Cornerstone is the one that controls and guides (head), and the one that determines the lines of the building (corner). This, in spite of the rejection of the unbelievers!
- ◆ The next part of the Stone’s description (v. 8) Peter takes from Is. 8:14.¹² This particular Stone is the kind which is προσκόμματος. “Stumbling” is seen here as the result of the action (the -μα ending of the root word) and not the action itself. But “stumbling” does not quite bring out the destruction of the unbeliever who runs into this Stone. Rather, the rejecting unbeliever runs full force into the Stone and is destroyed. Thus also the intent of πέτρα σκανδάλου. Note the shift from speaking of a Stone involved in building to one of sheer magnitude. In context, it is best to take σκανδάλου in its strongest sense, that of a trap that lures its victim to its death.
- ◆ Peter closes v. 8 with a final description of the actions of the unbelievers which he began in v. 7. The present tense of προσκόπτουσιν indicates that they continually carry out this futile action. Notice that Peter describes them as dashing themselves against the Word. This is not to be taken as the equivalent of λίθος, but as the means by which the unbeliever comes into contact with Jesus. The manner of their dashing against the Word is indicated by ἀπειθοῦντες. Their continual disobedience is how they dash against the Word.
- ◆ The final clause of this description of the unbelievers has caused some consternation. Part of the difficulty lies in determining the antecedent of the relative pronoun ὃ. No suitable neuter antecedent is located in the immediate context. Thus it is best to consider the antecedent a verbal idea in the clause; namely, that the unbelievers “dash against” the Word. Peter does not state here that the unbelievers are destined for unbelief (which is what gave Calvin ammunition for his false teaching), but rather that they are destined for carrying on the result of their unbelief.

¹⁰ The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief corner stone.

¹¹ λέγει αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰησοῦς, Οὐδέποτε ἀνέγνωτε ἐν ταῖς γραφαῖς, Λίθον ὃν ἀπεδοκίμασαν οἱ οἰκοδομοῦντες, οὗτος ἐγενήθη εἰς κεφαλὴν γωνίας....

¹² ...ὡς λίθου προσκόμματι συναντήσεσθε αὐτῷ οὐδὲ ὡς πέτρας πτώματι....

Commentary on verses 7b-8

In spite of unbelief and rejection, the Stone still becomes the Cornerstone! Regardless of who throws Jesus out as a result of some subjective test, even if it be religious “leaders” or “scholars,” Jesus remains the same (Heb. 13:7). He is shown to be even more than a mere foundation on which to build, because He also guides and determines the direction of His Church. What a blessing to us who are living stones in the Church! Conversely, what a curse to those who thoroughly reject Jesus. Instead of life He brings unbelievers death. More than one who simply beats his head against the wall, the picture Peter paints of the unbeliever is of someone who gets a long, running start, accelerates to a sprint, and runs full force into the immovable Cornerstone...time and again. What futility! What a demonstration that there is no salvation apart from Jesus.

Verses 9-10

(9) Ὑμεῖς δὲ γένος ἐκλεκτόν, βασιλείον ἱεράτευμα, ἔθνος ἅγιον, λαὸς εἰς περιποίησιν, ὅπως τὰς ἀρετὰς ἐξαγγείλητε τοῦ ἐκ σκότους ὑμᾶς καλέσαντος εἰς τὸ θαυμαστὸν αὐτοῦ φῶς· (10) οἳ ποτε οὐ λαὸς νῦν δὲ λαὸς θεοῦ, οἳ οὐκ ἤλεημένοι νῦν δὲ ἐλεθθέντες.

(9) But YOU are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for (His) own possession, so that you may proclaim the wonderful deeds of the One who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; (10) Once (you were) the ones (who were) not a people, but now (you are) the ones (who are) people of God, the ones who had not been shown mercy, but now the ones who have been shown mercy.

Vocables**Verse 9**

γένος – pred. nom. neut. sg.; people, nation (descendancy involved)

ἔθνος – pred. nom. neut. sg.; nation, people (Louw-Nida: largest unit into which the people of the world are divided on the basis of their constituting a socio-political community [same for λαὸς])

λαὸς – pred. nom. m. sg.; people

περιποίησιν – acc. f. sg.; possession, possessing for oneself (L-N: that which is acquired, presumably with considerable effort) [note on progression]

ἀρετὰς – acc. f. pl.; wonderful deeds; praise, honor, valor (lit.) (L-N: manifestation of power characterized by excellence)

ἐξαγγείλητε – aor. subj. 2 pl. fr. ἐξαγγέλλω; that you may proclaim throughout, report widely, tell everywhere

καλέσαντος – aor. ptc. gen. m. sg. fr. καλέω; who called

θαυμαστὸν – adj. acc. neut. sg.; wonderful, marvelous, remarkable, worthy of amazement

Verse 10

ἤλεημένοι – perf. pass. ptc. nom. m. 2 pl. fr. ἐλέεω; had (not) been shown mercy

ἐλεθθέντες – aor. pass. ptc. nom. m. 2 pl. fr. ἐλέεω; have been shown mercy

- ◆ Peter constructs a contrast with the preceding thought about the unbelievers in two ways: with the use of δέ, indicating that he is changing subjects; and with the use of the intensive personal pronoun ὑμεῖς. Especially in light of the unbelievers’ rejection of the Cornerstone, the

believers, Peter's readers, stand apart. Recall that these two verses are the return to the key point of the chiasm of vss. 4-10. This is another reason Peter establishes such a strong line of demarcation between the unbelievers and the believers.

- ◆ In v. 9 Peter recalls various phrases and ideas from the Old Testament which describe God's people. (Note the lack of articles with the nouns, stressing the quality of each.) The first phrase, *γένος ἐκλεκτόν*, brings to mind Dt. 7:6, Is. 43:10, 20, and 44:1-2.¹³ *Γένος* carries with it the idea of people who are somehow related, not just a generic group. The special nature of this group of related people is indicated by *ἐκλεκτόν*, the same word Peter used to describe his readers in the opening verse of the letter, and the same word used to describe the Cornerstone in v. 6.
- ◆ Peter also calls the members of this select group a *βασίλειον ἱεράτευμα*. This term comes directly from the LXX's rendering of Ex. 19:6.¹⁴ With it Peter also re-emphasizes the point made in v. 5, that the believers are holy priests. The addition of "royal" to the description of the priesthood of the believers is significant. With it Peter places believers on a plane that is not superceded by any other priesthood. In the Old Testament, the Levitical priesthood was not royal. The only mention of a royal priest is seen in the person of Melchizedek, since he was both a king and a priest (Gen. 14:18ff.). The priesthood of believers is highly unique. Operating under the Levitical priesthood, God's people were below the priests concerning their access to God. In the royal priesthood, believers have direct access to God through the great High Priest.
- ◆ The description of the believers continues with *ἔθνος ἅγιον*. Again Peter draws this term from Ex. 19:6. "Ἔθνος is the more general term for "nation," and simply conveys the fact that the believers constitute one unit which is distinct from all other groups of people. This distinction is even more sharply drawn with the adjective *ἅγιον*, which Peter had used in v. 5 to describe the priests. Again the idea of being set apart is stressed; believers are a special group of people because they have been consecrated by God. They stand out among all other peoples of the world (cf. 1:1).
- ◆ Peter adds that believers are *λαὸς εἰς περιποίησιν*. This term has its roots in passages such as Ex. 19:5 ("My own special treasure [LXX - *περιούσιος*; Heb. - *חֵן*.] among all the peoples") and Dt. 7:6. Most often in the LXX *λαὸς* is used to designate God's chosen people, an appropriate connotation for this context also. The picture drawn by *περιποίησιν* is vivid also: believers are the prized possession of someone who has worked hard to obtain them.

¹³ Dt. 7:6 – For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession. Is. 43:10, 20 – (10) "You are my witnesses," declares the LORD, "and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor will there be one after me." (20) "The wild animals honor me, the jackals and the owls, because I provide water in the desert and streams in the wasteland, to give drink to my people, my chosen..." Is. 44:1-2 – (1) "But now listen, O Jacob, my servant, Israel, whom I have chosen. (2) This is what the LORD says—he who made you, who formed you in the womb, and who will help you: Do not be afraid, O Jacob, my servant, Jeshurun, whom I have chosen."

¹⁴ ...ὁμοίως δὲ ἔσεσθέ μοι βασίλειον ἱεράτευμα καὶ ἔθνος ἅγιον...("and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.").

- ◆ To what end this special status? Peter's purpose clause mirrors the thoughts expressed in Is. 42:12 and 43:21.¹⁵ *You prized people just described, Peter states, have been so blessed "...so that you may proclaim the wonderful deeds...."* He places τὰς ἀρετάς forward for emphasis. Louw-Nida's definition of a "manifestation of power characterized by excellence" fits well for this term since God definitely displayed His power in making His believers what they are, and since the result certainly is excellent for the recipients. The report of these wonderful deeds is to be told everywhere. Luther comments about this aspect of the priesthood:

The first office, that of the ministry of the Word, therefore, is common to all Christians. This is clear...from 1 Peter 2:9.... I ask, who are these who are called out of darkness into marvelous light? Is it only the shorn and anointed masks [ordained priests]? Is it not all Christians? And Peter not only gives them the right, but the command, to declare the wonderful deeds of God, which certainly is nothing else than to preach the Word of God. ... So as there is no other proclamation in the ministry of the word than that which is common to all, that of the wonderful deeds of God, so there is no other priesthood than that which is spiritual and universal, as Peter here defines it.¹⁶

- ◆ Peter then describes ταῖς ἀρεταῖς in more detail with a substantive participial phrase: τοῦ ἐκ σκότους ὑμᾶς καλέσαντος εἰς τὸ θαυμαστὸν αὐτοῦ φῶς. God's calling of His people is the particular characteristic Peter stresses here. Here is also seen the root meaning of the term ἐκκλησία. Anyone who has been called out of darkness by God is a member of the holy Christian Church. The "calling" is God's effective call to faith (note the aorist tense). The genitive of τοῦ...καλέσαντος is possessive: the wonderful deeds belong to God.
- ◆ God's special people have been called ἐκ σκότους. Note the lack of the article with σκότους, indicating the severity and totality of this darkness. Isaiah referred to this darkness in Is. 9:2 (9:1 in the LXX - ὁ λαὸς ὁ πορευόμενος ἐν σκότει), which is the same darkness out of which God called His people: the darkness of unbelief, exclusion from the Kingdom of God. In this darkness languishes anyone not believing in God's mercy.
- ◆ How else might this transition of the people from darkness to light be described? With two relative tie-ons Peter adds additional descriptions of this rescue in v. 10. To do so he employs the language used in Hosea 1:6, 8-10 and 2:1, 23.¹⁷ The ποτε ...ἄν contrast mirrors the

¹⁵ Is. 42:12 - Let them give glory to the LORD And declare His praise in the coastlands. Is. 43:21 - "The people whom I formed for Myself Will declare My praise."

¹⁶ Martin Luther, *Luther's Works: Church and Ministry II*, vol. 40 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1958), pp. 21-22.

¹⁷ 1:6 - Then she conceived again and gave birth to a daughter. And the LORD said to him, "Name her Lo-ruhamah, for I will no longer have compassion on the house of Israel, that I would ever forgive them." 1:8-10 - (8) When she had weaned Lo-ruhamah, she conceived and gave birth to a son. (9) And the LORD said, "Name him Lo-ammi, for you are not My people and I am not your God." (10) Yet the number of the sons of Israel Will be like the sand of the sea, Which cannot be measured or numbered; And in the place Where it is said to them, "You are not My people," It will be said to them, "You are the sons of the living God." 2:1 - Say to your brothers, "Ammi," and to your sisters, "Ruhamah." 2:23 - "I will sow her for Myself in the land. I will also have compassion on her who had not obtained compassion, And I will say to those who were not My people, 'You are My people!' And they will say, 'You are my God!'"

contrast between sin's darkness and God's light. In the darkness, God's people were simply *ouv laoj!* Note the lack of the article, stressing the complete lack of any special quality to be recognized by God. While in the darkness, they were "nobodies." However, now that they have been brought from the darkness to the light they have become not just "somebodies," but God's very own! They now belong to God (genitive of possession), since He is the one who caused them to be born again (1:3).

- The second relative tie-on Peter uses to describe this transition is that prior to being rescued from the darkness the people had received no meaningful help from God in their time of need. Note the periphrastic stress on the participles in this clause. Prior to their rescue the people *continually* received no mercy (the perfect tense of ἠλεημένοι); now it was a definite *fact* that they had been brought into the light (the aorist tense of ἐλεηθέντες) through God's mercy. God is indeed the agent behind both passives.

Commentary on verses 9-10

Peter began this section of his epistle (1:3-2:10) stressing God's mercy. What a fitting way to close! In God's mercy He has made us who were hopelessly lost in the darkness, who were pitiable but not pitied, into His prized possession: we are God's priests. In this royal position we do not show conceit as we revel in our regality. Rather, the entire purpose for God's merciful rescue is that we will continue joyfully and thankfully to carry out the primary work of priests as we spread the incredible news of not just our rescue, but of the rescue of all mankind.

Application to the Present-day Discussion of the Public Ministry

None of us denies the existence of the universal priesthood. What may be an issue, however, is the *function* of this priesthood. That is, how broad is the scope of this priesthood's work? Is the priesthood limited only to proclaiming "the wonderful deeds of the One who called [them] out of darkness into His marvelous light" (v.9)? Where is such proclamation to take place? How broadly defined is such proclamation regarding content?

Keep in mind that Peter's purpose is not limited to detailing the functions of the universal priesthood. His primary goal is to encourage and give hope to his readers. Thus he emphasizes their status with God in contradistinction to their status with mankind. Peter simply states in vss. 5 & 9 that his readers *are* priests. Did his initial audience automatically recall Exodus 19:6 and all the implications therewith?

God's Old Testament priests (those in the Levitical office) were the mediators between Him and His people. Their duties and functions were numerous. Their primary function was to serve God and His people. God's New Testament priests retain the same primary function. They serve God directly and through their service to others. This service is inextricable with the Word. Luther lists the rights and privileges of the priesthood.

There is no other Word of God than that which is given to all Christians to proclaim. There is no other baptism than the one which any Christian can bestow. There is no other remembrance of the Lord's Supper than that which any Christian can observe and which Christ has instituted. There is no other kind of sin than that which any Christian can bind or loose. There is no other

sacrifice than of the body of every Christian. No one but a Christian can pray. No one but a Christian may judge doctrine. These make the priestly and royal office.¹⁸

The distinction between the universal priesthood and the office of the public ministry is encapsulated in the word *public*. All Christians are priests; not all Christians carry out this work on behalf of the church. We dare not over- or under-emphasize either of these roles in our day.

¹⁸ *Luther's Works*, vol. 40, pp. 34-35.