

Do Not Be Surprised at the Fiery Ordeal Among You

An Expository Journey Through **1 Peter** **1 Peter 2:2-8**

16- Becoming a Living Stone and a Spiritual House by Longing, Tasting, and Coming to the Rejected Living Stone, Part 2

April 22, 2018

1 Peter 2:2-8

2 like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation,

3 if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord.

4 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.

To the Glory of God

Now the challenge in this Passage that Brother Vern just read to us is to try to understand these strange sounding words and Apostolic commands, and try to comprehend what Peter meant when he said that we were to:

1. **long for the pure milk of the word**
2. [taste] **the kindness of the Lord**
3. [come] **to Him**

And the reason we need to try to understand these words is because to “long” for the Scriptures and to “taste” the Kindness of the Lord and to “come” near to Jesus is *how* we will:

... grow in respect to salvation

... which is just another way of understanding just *how* we are “sanctified”, or “made holy”, or what it means to “bear godly fruit”, or “please the Lord” with our lives, or “give God the Glory” that He deserves, or “abide in the Vine” [Jesus].

And, as we discovered last time, these three Commands to “long”, “taste”, and “come” are issues of the heart, and *not* merely “actions” that we must “obey” by putting forth human effort. And this gives us the main distinction between the heresy of “Legalism” and “serving God with gladness”:

Legalism: Seeking to be in right standing with God by engaging in religious activity based on human effort, human initiative, and human discipline.

Serving God with Gladness: Seeking to be in right standing with God by *longing* for the sincere milk of the Word, and by *tasting* the Kindness of the Lord, and by *coming* to Jesus for both our desire and strength.

Now in a day of great compromise, in an age where there is so much “loose living” and an almost universal *abandonment* of pursuing Biblical Holiness on purpose by those in the modern Church, many make the mistake of seeing the “rigidness” and the “order” and the “discipline” of Legalism as a *solution* to the heresy of “Lawlessness”. And so, they run into what they perceive to be the “safety” of Legalism.

But, dear friends, we must understand that Legalism is simply the other side of the very same coin as Lawlessness. *Both* are heresies. *Both* are wrong. *Neither one* is closer to the Truth. *Both* Legalism and Lawlessness (Antinomianism) attack the Grace of God head on.

Legalism *ignores* God's Grace while Lawlessness *abuses* it. Therefore, *both* heresies are evil perversions and damnable deceptions that warp the Grace of God and make it look hideous. Here is what the half-brother of Jesus, the man named Jude, wrote about heresy and those who promote it in **Jude 4**:

For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

We must understand that the Apostle Paul preached more against Legalism than he did against Adultery, and we could hardly say that Paul was "soft" on sexual sins. But, that dear Apostle saw the danger that Legalism brings to individual believers and to the Church as a whole, and so he clearly and repeatedly and unmistakably *condemned* Legalism, in all of its ugly versions. And so should we.

So, Peter sought to relieve the persecuted saints of his day from the tyranny that Legalism brings by focusing on issues that human beings simply *cannot* control in, by, and through human effort: longing, tasting, and coming.

You see, I can *force* myself to read the Bible. I can put forth effort to *discipline* myself to set aside time, *every single day*, to put my nose in this Book. And I can do that even if I'm not saved. *Many* lost people read the Bible, all the time. But I can't *make* my heart "long" for the sincere milk of the Word. I can't *force* myself to "desire" something. *That* takes a sovereign Act of God the Holy Spirit.

I can *discipline* myself to come to Church and to come to Prayer Meeting, and I can even exercise will-power enough to *force* myself to pray. But Jesus said that the Pharisees prayed long prayers, all the time, and yet they weren't born again. But what I *cannot* do, and what takes an Act of God in me to accomplish, is for me to "taste" the Kindness of the Lord. And, while I can *physically* be inside the Church, I cannot "abide in the Vine" unless God does a Work in me.

So, Legalism teaches that to obey what God has commanded takes human effort and human initiative, combined with human will-power and human discipline. And the people who engage in Legalism get on that tread mill and off they go. And, at first, they are so proud of themselves, because their effort at "being spiritual" seems to be "paying

off". Because, initially, they absolute do see signs that they are obeying God.

But, they soon realize that as soon as they get on the treadmill of Legalism, they are doomed. Because the lie of Legalism begins to go faster and faster, and it raises up higher and higher until it consumes them. And the neighborhoods of this city are filled with the dead carcasses of thousands of people who bought into the lie of Legalism, and today, you can't pay them to even come to Church.

But "serving God with gladness of heart" is a completely *different* concept that is based on a completely *different* dynamic. Because this way is *not* based on human effort. It is based on us humbly seeking God to *grant* to us what we lack, and then, God, sovereignly, graciously, giving us that new heart. And I'm not referring here to the initial Act of God in Regeneration; I'm referring now to the "day in and day out" *continual* Act of God in sanctifying us.

So, instead of us simply putting forth more effort (until we are exhausted and condemned), serving God with gladness has to do with issues like "longing" and "tasting" and "coming", things that we *don't* normally have, things that we must go to God and ask for, and things that God has to *create* inside us every day.

So, serving God with gladness *requires* first that we go to God in brokenhearted humility, and confess our great *inability* to obey Him, without Him helping us. It *requires* us to be honest with God and with ourselves, and confess that there are times when we *don't* "long for the sincere milk of the Word", and there are times that we *can't* seem to "taste His Kindness", and there are moments when we *don't* see how we can "come".

So, in those moments, we cry to Him to forgive us and to change us and to teach us and to empower us so that we may desire and to crave and to long for what He has said infallibly in Scripture. And we beg God to show us how we may once again "taste and see" that the Lord is Good. And we fall on our face and plead with God to open our eyes so we may see how to come and abide.

So, the entire dynamic of Sanctification is based on a *nearness* to Jesus. Jesus Himself called it "abiding in Him". And so, we realize that looking and hearing and tasting and smelling and feeling the world and its glitter and its gold and its false promises *deadens* and *diminishes* our capacity to see Jesus, in His spectacular Beauty. We become weary

on the journey and, many times, we see the Commands of God as nothing but more work to do, and we get exhausted at it all.

So, as the world promises a beautiful oasis, our weary hearts are drawn aside into the desert. But soon, that lie is exposed, and the promised oasis vanishes, and we are left dry and thirsty.

So, since we can't separate entirely from the world, we have a great need to periodically drink deeply at the Well of Water that never runs dry. We have a great need for God to unveil our eyes, all over again, so that we may behold the Majesty and the Excellence and the Beauty and the Glory of God, in the Face of the risen Lord. We have a need to periodically rest and eat the scroll.

And as the Value and Worth of Jesus rises in our minds, through the comprehension of His Word, Jesus will once again become the Treasure of the Universe, the Lilly of our valley, and our Bright and Morning Star, and *all* of our efforts and *all* of our actions and *all* of our struggle to obey will once again make sense, and will flow out from that Refreshing.

And the Source of this Refreshing is the various "Means of Grace" that God has provided the weary travelers, so they may actually do what Jesus offered in **Matthew 11:28-30**:

Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.

Now if you are struggling with these issues in a nation that is the richest and the freest and the most powerful nation in the history of the world, if you are struggling with these issues in a nation that has, for over 230 years, *avored* the Church and *avored* Christians, try to imagine how the "scattered aliens" of Peter's day were struggling, as not only did they struggle with the very *same* temptations and frustrations and weariness and worldliness that we struggle with, but, in addition, they had lost all of their earthly possessions and had been *driven* from their homes, and were looked at as criminal refugees, and who lived every day with the fear of immediate and total annihilation hanging over their heads.

And so, we dare not roll our eyes to what Peter is saying here, as though all of these deep and profound Truths, that this Apostle is teaching, have nothing to do with the struggles that we are facing in our day. Because the way that Peter is teaching here is *exactly* the way that God the Holy Spirit talks to those who are beat down, those who have lost hope, those who have lost sight of the Beauty and Majesty of their King. These Words are the Will of God to those who have become marginalized in their own country, those whose voice is increasingly ignored, those who have lost all things in this life, and those who are in grave danger.

So, in *addition* to the twin dangers of temptation and apathy, in *addition* to the twin evils of Lawlessness and Legalism, in *addition* to the scourge of Worldliness, these inspired and inerrant and infallible Words will help us “walk this world in white” when we are seemingly becoming less and less influential in our own nation, and when iniquity seems to be rising, and when compromise is all around us.

So, today, I want to dig even deeper into what Peter says here and find out what he meant in verse 5 when he was “moved along” by God the Holy Spirit to tell us how to:

- ✓ Be a “**living stone**”
- ✓ Be “**built up as a spiritual house**”
- ✓ Become a “**holy priesthood**”
- ✓ **Offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.**

.. and I would suggest that accomplishing what verse 5 says is predicated on us first doing what verse 4 says, so let’s read verses 4-5 again together:

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, 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.

Now I would offer that in these verses, we will find at least six steps in the way that God moves on His people in order to receive Spiritual Sacrifices that are acceptable to Him.

1. Jesus Christ, the Living Stone

1 Peter 2:4

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

Now notice that Peter calls Jesus a "Living Stone". And this great Apostle didn't *invent* this term. He borrowed this phrase from two different Old Testament Passages, one from the Prophet Isaiah and one from an unknown psalmist that says:

Isaiah 28:16

Therefore thus says the Lord God, "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a tested stone, A costly cornerstone *for* the foundation, firmly placed. He who believes *in it* will not be disturbed.

Psalm 118:22-23

22 The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief corner *stone*.

23 This is the Lord's doing; It is marvelous in our eyes.

... so, from the very beginning, Jesus was always going to be a "Living Stone".

2. Those Who Long for His Word and Who Have Tasted His Kindness, Come

Now there is an amazing phenomenon that occurs when human beings come into contact with God. We change. Human beings, no matter how sinful or how wicked, simply *cannot* remain the same in God's Presence. And we find that recorded over and over in God's Word. For example, look at how the people re-acted to Jesus in **John 7:40-46:**

40 *Some* of the people therefore, when they heard these words, were saying, "This certainly is the Prophet."

41 Others were saying, "This is the Christ." Still others were saying, "Surely the Christ is not going to come from Galilee, is He?"

42 "Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the descendants of David, and from Bethlehem, the village where David was?"

43 So a division occurred in the crowd because of Him.

44 Some of them wanted to seize Him, but no one laid hands on Him.

45 The officers then came to the chief priests and Pharisees, and they said to them, "Why did you not bring Him?"

46 The officers answered, "Never has a man spoken the way this man speaks."

... and there is the example of the three Disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration, and several others. But perhaps the *best* illustration of this phenomenon is found in **Isaiah 6:1-8**:

1 In the year of King Uzziah's death I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple.

2 Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew.

3 And one called out to another and said, "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts, The whole earth is full of His glory."

4 And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of him who called out, while the temple was filling with smoke.

5 Then I said, "Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I live among a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts."

6 Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a burning coal in his hand, which he had taken from the altar with tongs.

7 He touched my mouth *with it* and said, "Behold, this has touched your lips; and your iniquity is taken away and your sin is forgiven."

8 Then I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?" Then I said, "Here am I. Send me!"

When Isaiah saw God, when he came into contact with the Almighty, when God sovereignly unveiled his eyes so that he could behold the Glory of God, Isaiah was changed. And without any prompting and without anyone teaching him or telling him, three things automatically *flowed out* from what Isaiah saw:

1. He understood the Holiness of God
2. He was convicted of sin
3. He was eager to serve

... this is what happens to human beings when they see Jesus. But many times, our vision gets cloudy and our eyes become blind to the Brilliance and the Beauty of the risen Lamb. And that is when our service becomes *dry* and *forced* and *artificial*. And our labor for God and to His Glory and in His Name becomes a *burden*, and something that resembles hard, relentless *work* rather than the pathway to indescribable Joy.

And, at that moment, what we need more than anything else is *not* merely to put forth more effort. What we need to do is to "see". We need to remember what this is all about, and that the Words of Scripture and Prayer and Godly Fellowship and the Sacraments and our Service to God are *not* Works by which we can earn Favor with God, but they are the precious, kind, and sweet Pathways that our Good God has provided to put us in a position to escape the lies that money and possessions and this life present to us, so that we may be *refreshed* in the Presence of the Lord, so that we may once again behold Jesus!

Now it is true that, *sometimes*, we will have to expend effort and be determined and exercise discipline to get there. *Sometimes* we get so ensnared in the cares of life and the deceitfulness of wealth and the lust of other things that it takes a lot to break us free. *Sometimes* we may even need help from a fellow-laborer, who is on the same straight and narrow path. But the Goal is *never* to simply to check off the list of things we are "supposed to do". No, the Goal is to behold God in Christ, and then to:

1. *Love* what we see
2. To be *changed* into what we see

... and then *all* of our efforts and actions, and the bearing of godly fruit, will *normally* and *naturally* flow out from the soul that has been refreshed and transformed.

And what we need to understand is that this miracle, this supernatural experience, doesn't happen one time when we are first saved. It should happen *often*, all during the process of Sanctification. And it should occur more and more frequently as we are drawn closer to our Savior. George Muller, who ran orphanages in England back in the 19th Century said:

“... the first and most important duty of my day is to get my heart happy in God through reading the Bible and praying, not to get others’ hearts happy, but my own.”

... which is why I suggest that early in the morning, *before* we look at the TV, and *before* we get on the tablet or computer, and *before* we read the newspaper, and before the phones begin to ring that we spend that precious quiet time with Jesus, “getting our hearts happy”. Robert Murray McCheyne, the beloved nineteenth-century Pastor, once said:

“The greatest need of my people is my own personal holiness.”

... and the way that Peter describes this phenomenon is that those who *long* for the sincere milk of the Word, and those who have *tasted* the Kindness of the Lord, *come*.

But then, in verse 4, Peter cautions us that we should come to Jesus in a certain way. We should come to Him:

... as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God

So, during these times of being refreshed, our minds must be refocused *away* from this fallen world, and onto Jesus, as the One Who was *categorically* rejected by Man, but Who is also, at the same time, the *one and only* “Choice” of God, and the One Who is “precious” in the Sight of God.

So, we seek to behold the *rejected* Christ, the *maligned* Christ, the Christ Who, in His beaten and broken Body, came across as Someone Who could *not* help us and Who offered *nothing* that we need. And yet, this same Jesus, Who was despised and rejected by fallen Man, is the only Being in the Universe to Whom it was said:

Matthew 3:17b

... This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased.

He is the only Being in the Universe that can make this claim:

Matthew 28:18b

... All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.

... and therefore, Jesus is the only Being Who is Worthy:

The Revelation 5:1-10

1 I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a book written inside and on the back, sealed up with seven seals.

2 And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the book and to break its seals?"

3 And no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the book or to look into it.

4 Then I *began* to weep greatly because no one was found worthy to open the book or to look into it;

5 and one of the elders said to me, "Stop weeping; behold, the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has overcome so as to open the book and its seven seals."

6 And I saw between the throne (with the four living creatures) and the elders a Lamb standing, as if slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God, sent out into all the earth.

7 And He came and took the book out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne.

8 When He had taken the book, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each one holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.

9 And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood *men* from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.

10 "You have made them *to be* a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth."

And by using the words “Precious” and “Costly”, Peter and Isaiah meant to say that Jesus was *infinitely* valuable, precisely because He is *infinitely* rare. There is no one like Jesus; He is truly a “one of a kind”.

3. As We Long, Taste, and Come, We Are Shaped into “Living Stones”

1 Peter 2:5

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.

The result of "longing", "tasting", and "coming" to Jesus is that we are shaped into what Peter called "living stones" for use in a "spiritual house." And this is simply Peter's way of discussing the amazing miracle of what happens to human beings when they behold the Glory of God in the Face of Jesus Christ. We don't simply understand some truths about Him, but we begin to actually "abide in Jesus". So, this is *more* than merely mentally agreeing with what the Bible says. It is actually *experiencing* this closeness and nearness. And that happens because being so graced by God that we long for the sincere milk of the Word, and being so blessed by God that we taste and see that the Lord is Good, and being so favored by the Almighty that we come to Jesus, we are changed.

And we are changed from being "unfit" to being "fit". We are transformed from "*not* belonging" to "belonging". We are moved from being *without* God and *without* Hope-to becoming a "bought and paid for" possession of God and of having *great* Hope.

So, this radical transformation causes us to be able to be placed into this "spiritual house" which is the Church, along with all of the other believers who also have seen the Lord, and who have also been changed, and who are also being made fit for God's use.

For God to continually sanctify us, for God to *ongoingly* remove the various wrong beliefs, actions, and dispositions that we have (along with our sin), that hinder God from being glorified in, by, and through us, is simply another way that God demonstrates His Great Love toward us. And God knows (better than anyone else) that His people being transformed into the Image of Christ that they see (and therefore "fitting in" with the other believers into His Church) not only brings God the Glory that He so deserves, but is also the pathway to the fullness of Joy for us.

4. We Are Built into a Spiritual House

Fourth, when we come to the living stone and are shaped into living stones ourselves, we are built into a "spiritual house." And we must know that Jesus Christ is the Builder here. He "builds" individual

Christians into His Body, the Church, that Peter describes here as a Spiritual Temple. And the way that Christ "builds" this House is through the miracle of the New Birth, and through the *continued* miracle of Sanctification.

So, what we have seen so far is that God the Father lays this *rejected* Stone, Jesus Christ, in Zion, that is, in Jerusalem, and men rejected Him, when they cried, "*Crucify Him!*" But God has chosen this Stone and regards Him as infinitely precious. And God approved all that Jesus said and did while He was here. And the proof that God was totally pleased with Jesus lies in the fact that God raised Him from the dead. And then, God made Jesus to be an ever-living Stone, and gave Him the place of highest Honor at the very "Head of the Corner".

And God the Father did all of this to the end that Jesus Christ would redeem every single sinner that God chose to save. And God the Spirit would then gather that redeemed people who would themselves be alive like their Head, and would make up a Temple, a Church, an eternal Dwelling Place for the Spirit of God.

5. We Are a Holy Priesthood

1 Peter 2:5

You also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices...

It is, at this point that the unspeakable Greatness of this Reality *forces* the imagery to break down. Because as good and as amazing as what Peter has already told us is, the Apostle goes even *deeper* to tell us that not only are we "living stones being built into a spiritual house for God's habitation", but that we are also a "holy priesthood." In other words, we are *not* merely the "passive building" where God Almighty dwells; we are also the "active participants" in Worship. And not just any participant, but a special *kind* of participant: the priests. And that is all of us, all believers. This is the great Biblical Truth that was *re-discovered* in the Protestant Reformation, the Teaching about:

The Priesthood of all Believers

You see, unlike the way it was under the Old Covenant, under the New all believers are ordained as "priests unto God" in this new

Spiritual House, the Church. It is completely foreign to the writing of the New Testament to have a "hierarchical system" of professional priests. Any religious system that has this hierarchical system of priests is violating both the spirit and letter of the 27 Books of the New Testament.

Our privilege now as "believing priests" is to *draw near* to God with what Peter called "spiritual sacrifices". The priests brought the sacrifices into the Tabernacle in the Old Testament. But, under the New Covenant, that Tabernacle is replaced by the Christian Church. The "atoning altar" is replaced by Jesus Christ and His Shed Blood. And the Old Testament priests are replaced by you, those who believe in Christ.

6. Spiritual Sacrifices Are Offered to God Through Christ

... a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

... so the Goal of all this is that these "spiritual sacrifices" would be offered which are acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

So, God's Goal is that we offer Him "spiritual sacrifices". And we can only do that "through Jesus Christ." Jesus is the Living Stone, and so, every bit of this hangs on our "coming" to this Living Stone. If we don't come to Jesus, the Living Stone, then we *don't* have any spiritual Life, and we are *not* built into a "spiritual house", and we do not become a "holy priesthood", which will mean we will not offer up "spiritual sacrifices". It all hangs on Jesus and us connecting with Jesus, coming to Jesus. And that is why Peter ends verse 5 with the words

... to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

And this should cause us to love Jesus with all our hearts. He is the only Way to God. He is the only Way for us to live forever. He is the only Way for us to be a "dwelling for God". He is the only Way we can do anything "acceptable to God". And this is why verse 7 says that Jesus is:

This precious value

... so, Jesus is very costly to us who believe. There is no greater Value in the entire Universe than Jesus. He means more to us than anything or anybody.

Just think of all the people around the world who know there is some kind of "god". Nature declares His Glory and their own consciences tell them it must be so. But they don't know how to do anything fully acceptable to this God, because they don't know Jesus. They try rituals and disciplines and sacrifices and vows and relics and virtues, but all in vain. Because God says (at the end of verse 5) that the sacrifices that are acceptable to Him are acceptable only "through Jesus Christ." Not through human effort or human merit or human achievement or even our sincerity, but "through Jesus Christ."

And that's why the Apostle Paul said in **Romans 15:18a**:

For I will not presume to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me...

The *preciousness* of Christ to our hearts is this: through Jesus, we know God, and through Jesus, we come to God. And through Jesus, we experience the Presence of God, and through Jesus, we offer acceptable sacrifices to God. So, without Jesus all there is is Distance and Darkness and Wrath. So, Peter is good to tell us that Jesus is precious, very precious, indeed.

Now let's walk *backward* through some of these six steps so we can see then in another light:

What exactly are these "spiritual sacrifices" that we offer to God through Jesus Christ (v. 5b)? Because, if that's the Goal of everything else, it must be very important. So, what is it?

Well, in **Romans 12:1**, the Apostle Paul says that we are to:

... present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is* your spiritual service of worship.

... and that means that everything we do with our bodies is to be done as an "act of Worship" to God. So, whether we eat or drink, or hammer nails or drive a car or make a meal or program a computer or read a book or shoot a basketball or mend a shirt, whatever we do with our bodies, we are to do it to the Glory of God. And, at that time, it is, what Paul called, "our spiritual service of worship".

So, it might include singing or speaking words of praise as in **Hebrews 13:15**:

Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name.

... so the "spiritual sacrifices" are actually the praises and thanks of God's people alone and in group worship.

Or it might include "Acts of Love" like giving and sharing. For example, in **Philippians 4:18**, Paul receives gifts of support from the Philippian church, and said:

But I have received everything in full and have an abundance; I am amply supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you have sent, a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God.

... and, in **Hebrews 13:16**, it says:

And do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.

So, what exactly are the "spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" that Peter is talking about? They are the deeds we do, and the words we speak, and the songs we sing, when we do them "spiritually". That is, when we do them in total reliance on the Power of the Spirit, and when we do them in accord to the Will of the Spirit, and when we do them to God's Glory.

So, what Peter is saying here is clearly a word for us here at the Covenant of Peace Church. Is what we do "spiritual"? Are the sacrifices we offer "spiritual sacrifices"? Are the Leaders of our Church being "spiritual people"? Do we sing in the Power of the Spirit, and according to the Will of the Spirit, and to God's Glory, as a manifestation of the Spirit of Christ? Do our instrumentalists play their instruments in the Power of the Spirit, according to the Will of God, and to God's Glory, as a manifestation of the Spirit of Christ? Do I preach in reliance on the Power of the Spirit, and according to the Will of God, and to God's Glory, as a manifestation of the Spirit of Christ?

Is our worship "spiritual"? We need to know, because if it is not, then it is not acceptable to God. And if it is, He will accept it, not

because it's perfect, it will never be perfect in this age. It won't be because it's refined or well-crafted. Our Worship will be accepted by Jesus only because it comes "through Jesus Christ." Spiritual Sacrifices are sacrifices from Christ and through Christ and to Christ and for Christ. They get their Power from the Spirit of Christ, they get their Content from the Word of Christ, and they have their Goal in the Glory of Christ. And they flow only from a heart devoted to His Power and His Word and His Glory. And, ever since the Resurrection, that is the only kind of Worship God accepts.

The second step in moving backward through the six steps is that these "spiritual sacrifices" must be offered by a "holy priesthood". And that's not merely the Pastor and Elders and Deacons. It isn't merely the "Worship Team". The Holy Priesthood, in the New Testament, is you, the redeemed people of God.

Every truly born-again soul has access to God through Jesus Christ. So, we do not take our sacrifice to the priest and then watch while he takes it to the altar or to the tent of meeting with God. No. We all are called by God to approach the altar and the throne, and to make our own personal sacrifice in both our own personal life and in corporate worship.

And that is why we must "be holy" (1:15). We must be set apart for God. We must be cleansed by the Blood of Jesus Christ through faith, and dedicated to relentless and ruthless opposition to sin in your life. So, if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. If your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out. You are now a priest to God. You are now a part of a worship team called "the holy priesthood." And without this God-wrought Holiness, we do not offer "spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ".

Third, this "holy priesthood" is also a "spiritual house." We are all "living stones" built by God into a "spiritual house", that is, a Temple made for the Presence of a holy God. Listen to the way Paul said this in **Ephesians 2:19-22:**

19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household,
20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner *stone*,

21 in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord,

22 in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.

The main thing here is that we, as part of Christ's Church, are meant by Christ to be a "corporate dwelling" of God in the Spirit. It's true that each of us, individually, is the Temple of the Holy Spirit (**1Corinthians 6:19**). But there is more of God to be known and enjoyed than anyone can know in isolation. And that is why we are being "fitted together", Paul says, for a Temple and for a Dwelling of God by His Spirit. There is a Presence and a Power and a Manifestation of the Spirit of God that is meant to be known in this gathering of worship that we do not know at any other time in isolation.

So, we are not just *isolated* living stones. We are, verse 5 says, being built (by Christ, "I will build my church") as a spiritual house. The stones are meant to so fit together in this house called "Covenant of Peace" that something whole, something more than a collection of individuals comes into being a Temple, a Dwelling of God by His Spirit. And O, how jealous I am to see that happen more than it ever has.

And to that end let me just return to the strategy Peter focuses on for this to happen. He says in verse 4:

"And coming to Him [Christ] as to a living stone, rejected by men, but chosen and precious in the sight of God, you also, as living stones, are being built."

... so, *how* are we being built into this spiritual house? By coming to Christ.

Now be careful here. This is *not* a reference to Conversion, that initial "coming" to Christ. This here is a reference to the daily, hour-by-hour "drawing near" to Christ as a strong, living Person.

Now notice, verse 4 flows out of verse 3, and refers back to it with the word "him." Verse 4: "Coming to HIM"—to whom? To the One Whose Kindness you have tasted. And this helps us get a good handle on what "coming to Christ" actually means. Verse 3 is an *incentive* in both directions. It motivates verse 2 and it motivates verse 4.

So, if you have “tasted” the Kindness of the Lord, then (v. 2) “long” for the Word of Christ the way a baby longs for milk. And if you have “tasted” the Kindness of the Lord, then (v. 4) “come” to Christ.

Therefore, “coming to Christ” is what you do when you *long* for His Word the way a baby longs for milk. And as you long for it, then come to it and feed on it and find Christ in it.

Psalm 36:8

They drink their fill of the abundance of Your house; And You give them to drink of the river of Your delights.

Dear friends, if we are going to be a spiritual temple for God's Presence, and if we are going to be a “holy priesthood”, and if we are going to offer “spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God”, then we must day-by-day, hour-by-hour “come” to Jesus Christ. And we must “taste His Kindness by longing for His Word, His Promises, and His Commands, His Teachings, and His Warnings until we are so filled with Jesus that His Word will dwell among us richly as we teach and admonish one another with thankfulness in our hearts to God.

Amen. Let's pray

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.