

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
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THE BASICS OF CHRISTIAN GROWTH AND BEHAVIOR

I Peter 2:1-12

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You'll gain a lot more from the message if you'll get your Bible and follow along with me. Go to First Peter in the New Testament.

Here are the three points to my message:

- The Christian should know the basic diet.
- The Christian should know his or her role with Christ.
- The Christian should know how to behave.

INTRODUCTION: We continue our study of the book of First Peter. The book was actually a letter written to churches that were full of exiled believers in the area we call Turkey today. Christians were undergoing persecution but we are not sure to what extent.

There was no government sanction of persecution, and many believe the persecution they faced at this point was probably serious harassment. There were a lot of rumors about the beliefs and practices of Christians. They were a peculiar bunch, engaged in society but with a different life ethic.

In chapter one of First Peter, we looked at Foundations of the Faith and Moving On Toward a Better Life. Today, we'll look The Basics of Christian Growth and Behavior.

THE CHRISTIAN SHOULD KNOW THE BASIC DIET

SCRIPTURE: 1 Peter 2:1-3

Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy and slander of every kind. ² Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, ³ now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.

EXPLANATION: Verse 1 is how Christians should not act. Verse 2 is how Christians should act.

So in verse 1 - if a Christian has any of these traits, then the lost world will question the legitimacy of it all. A church cannot be effective and unified when people live out deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander. Before we can grow as disciples, we must rid ourselves of the things that keep us from growing. Once we do that, we can begin to grow like newborn babes, enjoying the same nourishment from the Lord. When we grow together, then we are unified as believers.

*Like newborn babies, “crave” pure spiritual milk. The Greek word for crave here carries with it the same meaning as the English word crave: to long for, to strain after, desire greatly, have affection for. For what? For pure spiritual milk. The Greek word for “pure” is *ad'-ol-os* which means “without bait or deceit, not caught in a trap, free from trickery, free from mixed motives”. Why? *So that you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.**

One Christian writer said, “When we are growing in the Lord, we are peacemakers, not troublemakers.”

Not only should the Christian know the basic diet, but **THE CHRISTIAN SHOULD KNOW HIS OR HER ROLE WITH CHRIST.**

SCRIPTURE: 1 Peter 2:4-5

As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him — (underline “living,” “chosen,” and “precious”. He is the living stone because he rose from the dead.)

... *you also, like living stones (compared to Jesus in verse 4) are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood (chosen, like verse 4 says about*

Jesus), *offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ* (this is precious to the Lord, like the description of Jesus, also in verse 4).

EXPLANATION: We are stones in the same building as Jesus Christ. I want everyone to understand this. We are not Jesus, but because of Jesus, we are “like” him. God only accepts things that are through Jesus Christ. On our own terms, our works are nothing but rags. The self-made man or woman is nothing more than a sinner in the eyes of God. However, because of Jesus, there is not a self-made man or woman, but people whose lives are surrendered to him. When God sees the person surrendered to Christ instead of the person, God sees Christ in that person. Do you understand that? It might take some effort for you to figure that out, and it might not make any sense to you if you’ve been led to believe that your good works are what save you.

You know there is not one person watching this who can do anything at all independent of Jesus Christ that impresses God. It’s only because of the work of Christ in us that gets us any notice from God at all. Again, that might be hard for some of you to wrap your heads around, but it’s true.

Back to verse 4 and this talk of living stones: Jesus is called the living stone, one that is chosen and precious. Verse 5 tells us that we are like living stones. Do you know why? Because those who are in Christ are made of the same material as Christ. We are stones in the same building as Christ. Really, it’s mind-blowing when you think about it.

We know about the priests of the OT and their sacrifices, don’t we? But in Christ, it’s different. The phrase “spiritual sacrifices” means invisible. The Greek word for spiritual is *nyoo-mat-ik-os*, which means the invisible sphere in which the Holy Spirit imparts faith, reveals Christ, and so on. We offer invisible sacrifices. What in the world does that mean? It means the attitude of the heart. For example, repentance is a spiritual sacrifice. Loving the unlovely is another example.

I want you to see the picture here: The OT priest had an altar made of stone. He helped people sacrifice animals on the stone altar for the pardoning of sin. Literal stone, literal sacrifice. I don’t completely understand it, because there is so much to know about how it was back then, but there wasn’t really an option to just repent in

the altar of one's heart and mind only. The requirement was a literal stone altar and the literal animal sacrifice. Jesus Christ was the final sacrifice for sin and today when we repent of our sin, there is no need for a literal stone altar and a literal sacrifice of an animal because Jesus was the final sacrifice. Today's repentance is spiritual, meaning it is done within the heart and mind.

So the image of stones here is just that – it is an image. The repentant believer is like a living stone that is made of the same living stone substance as the risen Lord. In other words, we are a living stone altar...and according to Romans 12, *We are a living sacrifice*. A living sacrifice is a living dead thing. What does that mean? It means alive in Christ, dead to self.

Next, Peter quotes three OT scriptures related to the Lord with the image of a stone: The first is Isaiah 28:16 found right here in First Peter.

SCRIPTURE: 1 Peter 2:6-10

For in Scripture it says: "See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame."

⁷ *Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe,*

(Then he quotes Psalm 118:22)

"The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone," (People rejected Jesus as the Messiah, he was the rejected stone but became the cornerstone of salvation.)

⁸ *and, (a quote from Isaiah 8:14) "A stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall."*

They stumble because they disobey the message—which is also what they were destined for. (Simply put, if you disobey, you will stumble.)

⁹ *But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.* ¹⁰ *Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.*

EXPLANATION: This declaration from Peter must have been spellbinding to the people who heard it. In chapter 1, verse 1 we see that the book was addressed to the exiles scattered throughout five provinces in what is now Turkey. These people, scattered, were away from their homeland. The Roman government was so powerful they knew they'd never see their homeland again. They were displaced, but they had found Christ and therefore they had a new hope.

Politically speaking, they were nobodies living in a land that was not theirs – but in Christ they were somebody. But because of Christ, they were more than just somebody. Now they were a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession. In other words, although they may have been exiled, God knew exactly where they were.

Let me explain this a little further. In the Old Testament, after God gave the Law to Moses, in a manner of speaking, a person's faith in God was dependent upon being connected with the temple, or the portable tabernacle when they traveled. The religion, for lack of a better term, was dispensed through priests and prophets and the whole sacrificial system was hovered around the temple. People traveled, yes, but they always returned to temple to sacrifice. In a manner of speaking, if a person left the family of faith, they left God. So, for people to be exiled in a scattered way was the worst possible thing because they couldn't return to the temple to sacrifice and participate in the other rituals.

However, with Christ, the old had passed and the new had come. With Christ, one's relationship with God was no longer dependent upon living in a geographical location. One's forgiveness of sin was no longer dependent upon being able to sacrifice with the assistance of a priest. No, with Christ, everything was new.

This newfound faith in Christ was portable. It was not bound to any geographic location. Sacrifices were no longer necessary because Christ was the final and ultimate sacrifice. In fact, his sacrifice more than made up for all the inadequacies of the animal sacrificial system. They were only shadows pointing to the sacrifice of Jesus anyway. So whether someone lived in Israel or was exiled in the five regions mentioned in chapter 1, it didn't matter. Because the church age had been born. We are still in the church age today. One day it will pass – that's a sermon for another time.

ILLUSTRATION: Here's a rather weak illustration: There was once a time when the only way to hear music was to be in the presence of someone playing an instrument.

- Around 1877, music was recorded. Now a person could have music anywhere there was a phonograph.
- Then the radio was invented and sometime around 1905 or 1906, music was transmitted. Wherever there was a radio, there was music.
- In 1930, the first radio was put into a car. You could listen to music as you traveled.
- In 1954, the transistor radio was invented, and music was completely portable. You could listen to music anywhere, and you did not have to be right next to someone with an instrument.

EXPLANATION: I said that was a weak illustration and here's why. In the OT, people had to be connected with the family of faith to experience faith in God. In other words, it was not portable, really, as they always returned to the temple.

In my illustration about music, though you could take music everywhere, the quality of the music was diminished from that of a live performance.

With the newfound faith in Jesus, the people of the New Testament learned that the Holy Spirit was with them everywhere, and there was no diminished quality the further they were from Israel. In fact, since there was no need for priests anymore, and since there was no need to sacrifice at the temple or at a makeshift, the people were completely liberated because wherever they were, 100 percent of Jesus was with them.

Now, the family of faith, or the church, could be anywhere believers gathered. Priests were not needed. The altar was not needed.

So the fact that the people were exiled didn't matter. They were a *chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession*. These had to be some of the most liberating words they had ever heard. But there was a reason they were given this wonderful description and here it is: *that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light*.

I point this out to you because the verse about the royal priesthood is misused. I've heard this verse quoted many times with a "look at me...because in Christ I am a royal priesthood..." and so on. But the reason is *that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light!!!*

Not only should the Christian know the basic diet and know his or her role with Christ, but...

THE CHRISTIAN SHOULD KNOW HOW TO BEHAVE

SCRIPTURE: 1 Peter 2:11-12

Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul. ¹² Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

The sin problem in the day this was written was just as real as it is today. Why does Peter say as "foreigners and exiles abstain"? Why doesn't he just say abstain? I'll tell you why and it's pretty obvious. Because we like to stick things to foreigners. If a foreigner commits a crime, everyone knows it! Once, I heard someone talking about a car wreck and one man said, "Let me guess, the person who caused the wreck was here illegally, did not have a license, and did not have insurance." The other man said, "Yep. You are right." We've heard that story before and hung onto it.

Did you know, before the military deploy, they go through briefings about customs and courtesies for the country of their destination? They are reminded to keep it clean so that no negative attention is brought to them as foreigners.

But what if the man had said, "Let me guess. The drunk driver was a war veteran with a purple heart." Wait...he would have never guessed that, would he?

Peter meant that as believers, they were living such a peculiar lifestyle they would have appeared like foreigners, and because of that, they should abstain from sinful desires. If they messed up, the people around them would have been more than glad

to point out their shortcomings and say, “That’s a Christian for you.” Peter told people that their behavior mattered. Their lifestyles were their testimonies.

In verse 12 where it says to live good lives so they might “see” (or behold) your good deeds...the word “see” or “behold” in Greek means to closely or narrowly inspect.

The world was so awful toward Christians, that even if they did right, they’d be accused of doing wrong. What a messed-up society. We are just about there again, aren’t we? History repeats itself.

Where are we today? A believer could very well be doing things right, but be accused by the world of doing things wrong. Here are some examples.

- To fight for the unborn is considered wrong by many.
- For a person to be innocent until proven guilty is considered wrong by those presumed guilty in the court of public opinion.
- To state that God created marriage to be between a man and a woman is considered wrong and even hate speech by many.
- We seem to be on the precipice of mob rule and for you to speak up against this in certain circles would end up with you being called wrong.

I want you to notice the sequence of things in First Peter chapter two:

The Christian must have a good spiritual diet. This leads to knowing your role with Christ which in turn leads to good behavior.

We see clearly here that Peter’s letter to the exiles is indeed very relevant for us today. It’s not just an old letter that’s been reproduced billions of times. It’s part of the living word of God, just like Jesus was called a living stone and we are part of his stone building.

For believers today, we should find direction for living in the book of First Peter. I encourage everyone listening to know for sure that you know Jesus as Lord and Savior. Repent of your sin and believe that God raised him from the dead and trust him, and no one else, as your Savior.

Acts 4:12 says *“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.”*

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