

BIBLE SERIES: "EXPLORING OUR AWESOME BIBLE"

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1 PETER 2-3 – THE CHURCH AS A SPIRITUAL TEMPLE

We continue to study Peter's wonderful epistle filled, like James' book, with so many *spiritual word pictures* learnt from Christ's use of parables.

Yet, some scholars find it hard to believe someone like Peter, who had little formal education, could write with such elegant and precise Greek. Indeed, they don't take into account what the Holy Spirit can do when a man gives himself completely to God and is given great responsibilities. Remember what God said to Moses: "See, I have called by name *Bezalel*...of the tribe of Judah. And I have filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship" (Ex. 31:2-5). If God can do this with a simple craftsman, *how much more* can He do with an apostle specially chosen and gifted with God's spirit to be one of the chief leaders of the Church!

As *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* points out, "Peter was considered by Jewish religious leaders as 'unschooled' and 'ordinary' (Acts 4:13). The superb literary style and sophisticated use of vocabulary in 1 Peter seem to indicate that its author must have been a master of the Greek language...Though Peter could be called 'unschooled' and though Greek was not his native tongue, he was by no means ordinary. The Jewish leaders saw Peter as unschooled simply because he had not been trained in rabbinical tradition, not because he was illiterate. Luke also recorded (Acts 4:13) that these same leaders were *astonished* by Peter's confidence and the power of his Spirit-controlled personality. Peter's public ministry spanned more than 30 years...He lived and preached in a multilingual world. It is reasonable to believe that after three decades Peter could have *mastered* the language of the majority of those to whom he ministered." Thus, Peter is a great example for us of what God can do with normal people but are wholeheartedly committed to serve Him. As Paul said, "My God will supply *all* your needs" (Phil. 4:19)

In chapter two, Peter admonishes: "Therefore, putting away all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all detraction, as newborn babes, desire the spiritual milk which is unadulterated, that you

may grow thereby unto salvation, if you have tasted the goodness of the Lord" (1 Peter 2:2-3).

Here he continues with the analogy of a baby seeking its mother's milk for nourishment, just as we should *strive* to study God's Word in this way.

The next word picture he uses is that of a *builder*. Jesus was the equivalent of a *contractor*, for the Gk. term *tekton* is more than a carpenter and actually an artisan who works with both wood and stone. He uses this illustration: "Coming to Him as to a *living stone*, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, *as living stones*, are being built up a *spiritual house*, a *holy priesthood*, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. Therefore, it is also contained in the Scripture, 'Behold, I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone, elect, precious, and he who believes on him will by no means be put to shame.' Therefore, to you who believe, He is precious; but to those who are disobedient, 'The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone,' and 'A stone of stumbling and a rock of offense.' They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed" (1 Peter 2:4-8).

Here he uses another analogy about Christian growth, describing us as "living stones" since Jesus used the example of Himself as the cornerstone that was rejected by the Jewish nation (Mt. 21:42). The *cornerstone* was used as the standard for calculating the other corners of the building.

As *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* explains, "A cornerstone is *the visible support* on which the rest of the building relies for strength and stability. Believers trust in Christ, much as a building rests on its cornerstone." If we are conforming ourselves to the image of Christ, we will be polishing and smoothing out the rough edges of our lives. We, as "living stones" (i.e., our lives being transformed), will be stronger, more stable and noble. On the other hand, if we deviate from the model of Christ, we will eventually become a stone rejected by God and will not be part of that building called His Church.

Paul uses *the same analogy*: "So now you non-Jewish people are not visitors or strangers, but you

are citizens together with God's holy people. *You belong to God's family*. You believers are like a *building* that God owns. That building was built on the *foundation* that the apostles and prophets prepared. Christ Jesus himself is *the most important stone* in that building. The *whole building* is joined together in Christ, and he makes it grow and become *a holy temple* in the Lord. And in Christ you are being built together with his other people. You are being made into a place where God *lives through the Spirit*" (Eph. 2:19-21, ERV).

Next is a word picture about *the priesthood*. Peter says, "But you are a chosen generation, a *royal priesthood*, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; *who once were not a people* but are now *the people of God*, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy" (1 Peter 2:9-10).

Peter reminds the Gentile converts that God has included them as part of His holy people and they are now included in God's new covenant, with all its privileges. Peter quotes from Exodus 19:5-6: "Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be *a special treasure* to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me *a kingdom of priests and a holy nation*."

What a privilege for Gentile Christians to be part of that new covenant and are also of a royal lineage! They will now constitute part of those members who would be a light to the nations and help in the conversion of those called. They should also remember that their future reward will be even greater as they receive eternal life and enter into God's kingdom. As the scripture says: "And [You] have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth" (Rev. 5:10).

Peter then uses a word picture of *spiritual pilgrims*. He says, "Beloved, I beg you as *sojourners and pilgrims*, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation" (1 Peter 2:11-12). It is true that perhaps few will understand our behavior in keeping the Sabbath, God's Feasts and insisting on eating only

biblical foods. But one day, at Christ's return, they will understand the biblical reasons and recognize we did the right thing and had the love for God's truths. Then we will supervise the physical priests: 'Priests must teach my people the difference between what is sacred and what is ordinary, and between what is clean and what is unclean. They will make decisions in difficult legal cases, according to my own laws. They must also observe the religious festivals my Law requires and must always respect the Sabbath' (Ez. 44:23-24).

Peter knows most are facing severe persecutions and they are to follow Christ's example of non-violence. He tells them, "Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men—as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God. Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king" (1 P. 2:13-17).

It is important to note the emperor during this time was Nero (A.D. 54-68), who ruthlessly persecuted Christians, blaming them for the huge fire in Rome. He said Nero should be respected "for the Lord's sake" and they shouldn't rebel or take up arms despite all the persecutions and injustices they suffered. Peter never urged they form an army of armed 'Christians' to defend themselves--there is no such teaching in the entire New Testament. He says they need to follow Christ's example of non-violence and not resort to force or violence to defend themselves. They must not return aggression for aggression, but must assume the same attitude of Christ of loving their enemies in the face of persecution and violence.

Likewise, what were the Christian slaves, then a large part of the Church, to do? Should they resort to violence or rebellion if their masters treated them badly? No, on the contrary, Peter tells them, "Servants, be submissive to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh. For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully. For what credit is it if, when you are

beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: 'Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in his mouth; who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls' (2:18-25).

Clearly, this is not the attitude we see in today's Christian world. Almost everyone defends themselves aggressively just like the rest on the earth. We are God's *ekklesia*: "the called-out ones."

Regarding slaves, Barclay mentions: "To understand the real meaning of what Peter is saying we must understand something of the nature of slavery in the time of the early church. In the Roman Empire there were as many as 60,000,000 slaves. Slavery began with Roman conquests, slaves being originally mainly prisoners taken in war, and in very early times Rome had few slaves but by New Testament times slaves were counted by the millions.

"It was by no means only menial tasks which were performed by slaves. Doctors, teachers, musicians, actors, secretaries, stewards were slaves. In fact, all the work of Rome was done by slaves. Roman attitude was that there was no point in being master of the world and doing one's own work. Let the slaves do that and let the citizens live in pampered idleness. The supply of slaves would never run out.

"Slaves were not allowed to marry; but they cohabited; and the children born of such a partnership were the property of the master, not of the parents, just as the lambs born to the sheep belonged to the owner of the flock, and not to the sheep. It would be wrong to think that the lot of slaves was always wretched and unhappy, and that they were always treated with cruelty. Many slaves were loved and trusted members of the family; but one great inescapable fact dominated the whole

situation. In Roman law, a slave was not a person but a thing; and he had absolutely no legal rights whatsoever. For that reason, there could be no such thing as justice where a slave was concerned."

For a slave to become a Christian was very complicated. They had to ask permission and keep God's laws in private. But these benefits already existed in the Roman world for Jewish slaves and they could apply them. In fact, after Jerusalem's destruction in A.D. 70, most of the surviving Jews were made slaves and yet, under Roman law, they continued with their faith, keeping Sabbaths, etc.

After advising the slaves, Peter now advises the women of the church: "Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear" (1 Peter 3:1-2).

Women in that society had almost no rights. They were slightly superior to slaves. According to Roman law, they were the property first of their fathers and then of their husbands. They could divorce them for almost any reason, as long as they returned the dowry to the parents. It was easy for them to resent the abuse. But Peter advises them that they too should imitate the example of Jesus and overcome evil with good.

Barclay notes, "What, then, must have been the problems of the wife who became a Christian while her husband remained faithful to the ancestral gods? It is almost impossible for us to realize what life must have been for the wife who was brave enough to become a Christian. What, then, is Peter's advice in such a case? He does not advise the wife to leave her husband. In this he takes exactly the same attitude as Paul takes (1Cor.7:13-16). Both Paul and Peter are quite sure that the Christian wife must remain with the unconverted husband so long as he does not send her away. Peter does not tell the wife to preach or to argue...He tells her something very simple...to be a good wife. It is by the silent preaching of the loveliness of her life that she must break down the barriers of prejudice and hostility, and win her husband for her new Master." Peter is so inspiring!