

Building the Church

One of the great challenges we have as Americans in fully understanding God's word is our emphasis on individualism and personal autonomy. This is particularly noticeable when it comes to our understanding of what the Church is supposed to be. In these verses Peter gives us a beautiful picture of the Church, showing us its foundation, formation, and function.

Peter makes this main point of who we are and what we are to do in verses 4-5 and then elaborates on that point in verses 6-10.

1 Peter 2:4-10

As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, **5** you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. **6** For it stands in Scripture:

“Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone,
a cornerstone chosen and precious,
and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.”

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

“The stone that the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone,”

8 and

“A stone of stumbling,
and a rock of offense.”

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

9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

10 Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

I. The Foundation of the Church (v.4 and 6-8)

“As you come to him, a living stone...” (v. 4a)

It all begins with Christ. He is the cornerstone or foundation stone of the Church. While this would seem obvious, it is important to note that Peter wants us to understand Christ *as he is revealed in Scripture*. In verses 6-8, Peter quotes Isaiah 28, Psalm 118, and Isaiah 8 and attributes all of these descriptions to Christ. In Matthew 21, Jesus quotes this same verse from Psalm 118 and infers that it is speaking of Him. This is important because we are all tempted to make Christ who we want Him to be. Getting this “cornerstone” of the Church correct is important since all the other “living stones” must be aligned to Him.

II. The Formation of the Church (v.5 and 9-10)

“living stones...being built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood...” (v.5a)

The formation of the Church is God building a spiritual house made up of a new people. So the presence of God will no longer rest in a physical building as in the Old Testament, but will now rest in a spiritual building made of “living stones.” And who is this new people? Peter elaborates on this in verse 9 using Old Testament terms, now applied to the Church. We are a “chosen race” with a new identity given by God. We are a “royal priesthood” with a new intimacy with God. We are a “holy nation” with a new citizenship in the Kingdom of God. And we are a “people for his own possession” with a new value, having been purchased by the

precious blood of Christ. All these terms are intentionally plural and not individual. This is important because we are tempted to do the Christian life alone, rather than enjoying the blessing of being intimately connected to other believers through a local church.

III. The Function of the Church (v. 5b and 9b)

“to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” (v.5b)

While the Bible mentions several types of spiritual sacrifices that are offered by God’s redeemed people, it is clear from verse 9b that what Peter means here has to do with worship. And not just any type of worship, but the corporate worship of God’s people in the presence of the unbelieving world. The words of verse 9b remind us of Psalm 96 and the praise that is offered “among the nations” and “among all the peoples” (v.3). This is very important because we are tempted to minimize the importance and priority of the regular, routine gathering of God’s people for worship. This is our main purpose as a church and our main evangelistic witness to the world.

Discussion Questions

1. How would you describe the Church in America today? What are the common ideas people have about the Church?
2. What are ways that people reject Christ today? What are ways that people attempt to make Christ into what they want Him to be?
3. What are the points Peter is trying to make about Christ when he quotes the Old Testament here?
4. Why is it so important for Peter to emphasize the corporate nature of the Church? What are some of the ways he does that in these verses?
5. What are the phrases here that would be encouraging and affirming to God’s people? What are the phrases here that would be humbling to God’s people?

Going Deeper

1. What are some of the ways in which you are tempted to make Christ into what you want Him to be?
2. What are some of the ways you are tempted to go it alone in your walk with Christ?
3. What are some of the ways you minimize the priority and importance of weekly corporate worship?