

THE SPIRITUAL GROWTH OF THE BELIEVER

Summary and Historical Background

While chapter one emphasized the importance of being born into the family of God to receive living hope, chapter two stresses the necessity of spiritual growth to have glorious hope. Perhaps the best way to analyze the chapter is to concentrate on three similes.

In verse 2, Peter calls believers "newborn babes," who need to drink the milk of the Word of God daily in order to gain spiritual maturity. In fact, those who have tasted of the Lord will yearn after the spiritual riches of the Bible: it is a sign of genuine conversion.

In verse 5, believers are called "lively stones," the very material God uses to build His "spiritual house," which in turn rests upon Christ, the chief cornerstone (v. 6). Peter's purpose was to contrast the living, breathing, functioning church, which glorifies and serves God, with the temple in Jerusalem, which was soon to be destroyed.

In verse 11, believers are called "strangers and pilgrims," who have their citizenship in heaven, not on earth, and as such, they are to be free from this world's entanglements. They are to be impervious to the world's allurements which would impede their progress. Note, even though they serve a higher power, yet they are responsible to submit themselves to earthly ordinances to do the will of God (v. 15). The submission and suffering of Jesus Christ are given as a clear example for them to follow (vv. 21ff).

I. Newborn Babes — 2:1-3

A. Hindrances to Spiritual Growth — 2:1

2:1 — "Malice" - This is hatred; wickedness in general.

"Guile" — Craftiness; cunning words or works with the intent to deceive and hurt another, but to give oneself an advantage; using bait to catch fish.

"Hypocrisies" — Acting in a way to conceal one's real motives; being insincere.

"Envies" — Being jealous of another's good fortune - Lk 22:24. Envy only dies when self dies.

"Evil speaking" — Defamation; gossip; running down another person's character are sins of the mouth that indicate a person's heart condition. They cannot be laid aside except by the divine power that comes with the new birth.

B. Helps to Spiritual Growth — 2:2, 3

2:2 — Desire the Word of God. As a newborn babe desires milk, so a Christian should desire the Word of God. It is necessary for his spiritual growth. A loss of desire for the Word of God is a sign of ill health. When a Christian loses his desire for the Word of God, there is sin in his life (cf. v. 1). D. L. Moody used to say, "The Bible will keep you from sin, or sin will keep you from the Bible."

2:3 — Delight from feeding on God's Word makes the believer aware of the grace of God. Satisfaction stimulates growth. When a person is satisfied with what he eats, he is encouraged to eat it again. And the more he eats good food, the more he grows in health and strength. So it is when one is satisfied with the Word of God, he grows strong in his spiritual life and appreciates the grace of God in giving him good spiritual food.

II. Spiritual House — 2:4-10

A. The Living Stone — 2:4

2:4 — "Living stone" - Refers to Christ (cf. 1 Cor 10:4).

"Disallowed" — Christ was rejected by the Jews, His own people (Mt 27:20-25; Jn 1:11), but the Gentiles did not know Him and crucified Him as a criminal (Jn 1:10).

"Chosen of God"— God chose Him to die for our sins before the foundation of the world (1:20).

"Precious" — He is priceless. He had no sin of His own so only He could pay for all the sins of all people by shedding His blood on the cross for them. Therefore, His blood is precious.

B. The Living Stones — 2:5

2:5 — "Living stones" - Christians become living stones because Jesus, the Living Stone, indwells them (Col 1:27).

"Spiritual house" — This is a real house, but in a different realm than the material house Solomon built. Each Christian becomes a part of this spiritual house of which the earthly house is only a shadow. Every believer is important in God's spiritual house.

"A holy priesthood" — All Christians are priests, set apart to serve God. They have access to God through Jesus Christ, their High Priest (Heb 4:14-16).

"To offer up spiritual sacrifices" — The sacrifices of believer-priests in this dispensation are not the flesh and blood of animals, but spiritual sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving to God and doing good and sharing their possessions with others who are in need (Heb 13:15-16; Phil 4:18).

C. The Cornerstone — 2:6-8

2:6 — "Cornerstone" - The reference is to Christ from Isaiah 28:16. The laying of the cornerstone is critical to a building, because it has an effect on the structure of the whole building. So it is with Christ and the spiritual temple that God is building.

"Elect" — Chosen by God the Father.

"Precious" — Christ is unique. There is no one like Him. He is God and man. He is without sin. He died physically and is alive physically by His resurrection.

"Shall not be confounded" — Or, "shall not be put to shame."

2:7 — "He is precious" - To the believer Christ is precious because He is his best Friend (Jn. 15:15); He keeps watch over his soul (1 Pet 2:25); He cares for him (1 Pet 5:7); He gives him peace (Phil. 4:7); He empowers him to live a godly life (Phil 4:13); He supplies his needs (Phil 4:19); He is preparing a place in heaven for him (Jn 14:2, 3); He intercedes on his behalf (Rom 8:34; 1 Jn 2:1); and, of course, He made all the above possible by dying for him on the cross in payment for his sins (1 Pet 1:18, 19).

"Disallowed" — The "disobedient," the unbelievers, rejected the Stone (Christ) which was chosen by God to be the Cornerstone - cf. v. 4. This rejection was prophesied in Psalm 118:22, and Jesus applied it to the chief priests and Pharisees in Matthew 21:33-46, and it was fulfilled in Matthew 27:20-25.

2:8 — "Stone of stumbling" - Jesus is a stumbling Stone to the unbeliever. If the sinner will not believe God's Word so that he will obey it, then he will not accept Christ as the Cornerstone of God's spiritual house. The humility of Christ in His birth, life and death was contrary to the ideas the Jews had of the Messiah, so they rejected Him and stumbled over Him (1 Cor 1:23). As a result they were "broken," separated from God, unsaved (Mt 21:44). What happened to the Jews in their unbelief will happen to all unbelievers.

"Appointed" — Unbelievers are appointed (destined) to stumble. They will not be saved, because there is no salvation outside of Christ (Acts 4:12).

D. The People of God — 2:9-10

2:9 — "A chosen generation" - Christians are an elect race of people (cf. Ex 19:5-6; Deut 7:6). The terms used for Israel in the Old Testament are now used for the Church. This does not mean the Church is Israel, but that the Church has replaced Israel for this dispensation. God will return to Israel after the Church Age.

"A royal priesthood" — Christians are related to Christ, Who is both king and high priest. Therefore, they are more than "a holy priesthood" (2:5), but also "a royal priesthood" of the order of Melchizedek. As priests they are to worship God, minister the Gospel to the world, and intercede for sinners.

"A holy nation" — Christians are a special possession of God; He owns them.

"Show forth the praises of Him" — The responsibility of the Christians is to tell the world about the virtues ("praises") of God.

"Darkness . . . marvelous light" — Christians are reminded of the great change God brought to them when He saved them. This should be uppermost in their witness of Him.

2:10 — "Now the people of God" - Peter takes the words of Hosea concerning Israel and applies them to the Church (Hosea 1:9-11; 2:23). These words are true of the Church now, and they will be true of Israel after the Great Tribulation.

"Now have obtained mercy" — Cf. Hosea 1:6; 2:23.

III. Strangers and Pilgrims — 2:11-25

A. Live Blamelessly — 2:11-12

2:11 — "Strangers and pilgrims" - Christians are citizens of Heaven and are no longer at home in this world. They are merely traveling through this world as pilgrims. They look ahead to the Kingdom which Christ will set up in the future to rule the whole world.

"Abstain from fleshly lusts" — Sinful people take the natural desires of the body and misuse them. Christians are warned to abstain from such practices. How can a Christian abstain? (1) He must practice self-restraint (1 Cor 10:13; Titus 2:12; James 4:7); (2) die to self (Rom 6:1; Gal 5:24); (3) walk in the Spirit (Gal 5:16); and (4) make no provision for the flesh (Rom 13:14).

"War against the soul" — Fleshly lusts will destroy a Christian's walk with God and his testimony before the world if he allows them a place in his life.

2:12 — "Having your conversation honest" - "Conversation" means a way of life, how one behaves in life, so believers are to live blamelessly, behave honestly, before unbelievers.

"They speak against you as evil doers" — The world is prejudiced against Christians and speaks against them without sufficient evidence.

"Behold" — The Christians are responsible to show the world by their good works that they have been misjudged. This will stop some from slander and will cause others to glorify God (Mt 5:16).

"Day of visitation" — This expression may refer to the Lord's return, but more likely it refers to the day that the Lord visits them with salvation. As a result of seeing the good works of believers, they are saved and glorify God.

B. Live Submissively — 2:13-25**1. As Subjects — 2:13-17**

2:13 — "Submit yourselves" - The word for submission is a military term used for soldiers when they put themselves under the authority of their officer. Submission is the key thought for the rest of this chapter.

"To every ordinance of man" — Christians are to submit themselves to the laws of men. In a democracy or a republic they can work for the change of laws, but they must submit to those that have been passed unless their good conscience is violated. Then they will obey the law of God instead of man's law and will take the punishment of a government for breaking its law (Acts 4:19, 20; 5:29, 40-42).

"For the Lord's sake" — Christians are to obey the laws of a government as a testimony of their submission to the Lord, because it is He that gives authority to all governments (Dan 2:37; 4:17).

"To the king" — The supreme authority in a government of that time was the king.

2:14 — "Governors" - This term refers to officers who ruled under the king.

"Punishment of evil doers" — The government is supposed to protect the good and punish the wicked or else it will not last long. When governments persecute Christians for their faith in God, they are eroding their own moral strength and eventually it will cause their own destruction.

2:15 — "The will of God" - God's will for believers is to silence sinful men by submitting to the statutes of the state.

2:16 — "As free" - Christians are to use their freedom in Christ to obey the government and not use their freedom as a cover for disobeying it.

2:17 — A summary of the attitudes that Christians should have toward others is given in this verse.

"Honor all men" — All men are created by God and should be honored by Christians.

"Love the brotherhood" — All believers are in the family of God, are loved by Him, and should be loved by all other members of His family.

"Fear God" — This fear is a reverential trust and a respect for God's authority.

"Honor the king" — There is no command to fear the king. That is only given to God (Mt 10:28). But the king should be honored, even if he is cruel and unfair to Christians.

2. As Servants — 2:18-20

2:18 — "Servants" - The word used here means household servants. Peter addresses them because they composed a large part of the Christian community in Asia Minor.

"Be subject to your masters" — These servants were to submit to their masters whether good or crooked, whether they were kind or cruel.

"Harsh" — The Greek word meant crooked and was used for a snake.

2:19 — "Commendable" - The Greek word used is "grace." It is a thing to be commended, when a Christian servant endures grief from his master for doing those things that please God and give him a good conscience.

2:20 — "Buffeted" - This word means "to hit with the fist" (Mk 14:65). There is no glory, no praise, for the servant who gets beat up by his master when he does wrong.

"Acceptable" — This is the Greek word for "grace" again (v. 19). The Christian who suffers for doing right finds "grace" with God. He will be commended by Him for this behavior.

3. As the Savior — 2:21-25

2:21 — "Called" - God's calling (election) of believers is not only for salvation, but also for suffering (Phil 1:29).

"An example" — Christ's suffering for believers, as a sacrifice for their sins, is an example or model for them to follow, as they walk in His steps.

2:22 — "Who did no sin" - Christ's example is perfect. No one can follow His example perfectly, but Christians should try. This is a quote from Isaiah 53:9.

"Guile" — Or, deceit.

2:23 — "Committed" - Christ continually gave Himself over to His Father to judge the mistreatment He suffered throughout His ministry. He maintained perfect control of Himself through His whole life.

2:24 — Christ's sufferings climaxed when He died on the cross for His enemies.

"Dead to sins" — Those who receive Christ as their Savior are "dead to sins" and "should live unto righteousness." Good works should follow salvation.

"By whose stripes" — The context of Isaiah 53:5 and 1 Peter 2:24 show that Christ's stripes were for healing the spiritual sickness of sinners, of their sin and its penalty. Matthew said the prophecy in Isaiah was fulfilled when Jesus healed those with physical sickness (Mt 8:16-17). It was fulfilled in part, but the primary reason for Jesus' stripes was to heal those that were sick spiritually. In fact, when He saw the multitudes coming with the sick, He commanded His disciples to depart to the other side of the Sea of Galilee (Mt 8:18). Why? His primary task was to heal their souls by His death to pay for their sins. When sinners came only for physical healing, He withdrew from them. Those people misunderstood that He came to pay the penalty of their sins by His suffering. That is the context of Isaiah 53 and 1 Pet 2. He heals all that come to Him for salvation, but He does not heal all that come to Him for health.

25 — "Going astray" - Before salvation, the believers were wandering about as sheep without direction. They did not have the true Shepherd to guide them.

"Are now returned" — An aorist verb which speaks of a definite act that caused their wandering to cease. They turned to Christ for guidance (to be their Shepherd) and for management (to be their Bishop or Overseer).