

THE SINCERE MILK OF THE WORD

We turn today to I Peter, chapter 2. We will be examining the first ten verses of this chapter. You recall that Peter, in chapter one, had addressed elect strangers. These are the elect of God, the church of Christ, scattered over the whole world. These had been wondrously saved. The almighty Word of God had called them from their death in sin and had instilled into them a new life.

In chapter two we are reminded of the nourishment and growth of these elect strangers of God. The second verse compares these elect strangers with new-born babes. New-born babes eagerly seek milk. These desire and need that for their proper development. And they must receive pure milk. Anything else than this kind of proper nourishment would cause for them a stunted growth at best.

Christians have a "milk" which God has provided for them. It is called here the "Word of God." In chapter 1:25 we read of this same "Word" which "by the gospel is preached unto you". This is the "milk" which children of God must seek.

And it must be "sincere" milk, i.e., not adulterated or corrupted. All too often the "milk" of the Word is not "sincere". Often that which is presented as milk of the Word is so corrupted with the lies of man that it can not possibly nourish the hearers. That which is presented is poison--and those who drink can but suffer the consequences. The Word of God and the vain philosophies of man are ever at variance. Nor may this milk be adulterated. It must not be mixed with all kinds of things which are not truly the milk of the Word. If the preaching of the Word neglects or ignores important parts of the truths of Scripture, the one who hears again can only suffer. Just as a babe can not long survive if his milk is improperly diluted, so too with the child of God. He needs proper nourishment.

And every elect stranger must desire this too. There is something radically wrong if a baby does not want its milk. A healthy baby will hunt and seek until it receives the milk it craves. So it ought to be with the child of God. He does seek and desire the pure Word of God. He can not be satisfied with any diluted or adulterated Word. He wants what God has revealed in Scripture. He desires to have that sincere Word preached to him every Sunday. He understands that he needs this for his own spiritual development as a Christian. Let us then so see in ourselves the desire for this spiritual nourishment so necessary in a sinful world.

Verse three suggests that those who desire the sincere milk of the Word have already tasted that the Lord is gracious. The grace of God was shown centrally on the cross of Jesus. There, God sent His only-begotten Son in order to provide a payment for their sins. This same God, in His grace, works the life of Christ in the hearts of His people. These are born again, they are called to the light, they are given a desire and longing for spiritual things.

The elect stranger has tasted all of this grace or goodness of God. He tastes it when God works new life within him. And the taste is very good. In tasting, there is necessarily worked in him a desire for more and more of this grace of God. There is that well-known slogan in advertizing, "The more you eat, the more you want." That is surely true with regard to the spiritual life of the Christian. He who once truly tastes of God's goodness, wants that more and more. He who does not desire to taste more of this "sincere milk", shows serious sickness or spiritual death.

With this "sincere milk", the Christian grows. Just as a newborn babe, who makes regular use of milk, rapidly grows into a chubby baby, then an active youngster--so with the child of God. With the constant use of this spiritual food, there is real development in his Christian life. Increasingly, he will understand the meaning of the written Word of God. More and more he will seek his heavenly home. He will want that which is to the glory and honor of his God.

I might add: where there is not such spiritual growth, there is inevitably a decline. Just as one who stops rowing while travelling upstream in a river will then begin to drift backwards, so with the child of God. If there is ~~not~~ spiritual growth in one, there is necessarily a decline. Therefore we are encouraged to seek the sincere milk of the Word that we may indeed continue to grow in grace and truth.

But those who grow through use of this "sincere milk of the word", there must also be a forsaking of this world. Verse one points that out beautifully. There are certain things which a Christian must lay aside. There must be no more malice, or evilness of nature which seeks the hurt of another. There must be no more guile, or attempts to trap or entice others to their hurt and our temporal profit. "Guile" suggests the bait used in a trap to ensnare animals. Wicked men often use such "guile" on fellow-man. But the Christian flees all this.

He must flee hypocrisy, or that evil pretence in which he shows himself friendly and Christian, but in his heart he hates God and his neighbor. He must put away envies--jealousy

orspite toward another. And in conclusion, he must put away all evil speakings--backbiting, gossip, slander toward another. That too-common sin has no place in the life of one who has tasted the grace of God.

What a picture of the earnest Christian life which shows a desire for the things heavenly and eternal. How ~~does~~^{do} our lives compare with what Peter presents in these verses?

In verses 4 and 5, the apostle Peter begins another figure: that of a building or house. We are reminded in these verses that growth in the spiritual lives of Christians is also of an orderly and logical sort.

We are presented in verse 5 with the picture of a "spiritual house". This "house" emphasizes the truth that there is one unity, one whole, which is composed of many parts. The striking thing about a building is that it is composed of hundreds of individual parts. Yet each part has its own distinct, unique, place in the whole.

Peter speaks of a "spiritual" building. He has reference, therefore, not to some church building, nor even a certain denomination. This building is "spiritual" in the sense that it is the work of God and consists of God's people of every nation and of every age. And that house is "built up". It is that which is erected through the almighty work of God Himself. God determines the size and shape of this spiritual building. God determines where each member of that building must be. He erects this building through His power and grace during the ages of this world. And finally, when Jesus comes again in the clouds of glory, that church will have been completed; the building will be finished.

This spiritual building is further described as consisting of "lively stones". Literally these are living stones. Normally, we consider stones to be rather inanimate or inactive. A stone simply sets where it is placed. Yet with this spiritual building, the church, there are living stones. A stone fits into its particular place in the building. That is true for the Christian. God has determined that unique place where each belongs to complete this building. There are never too many nor too few stones. The exact number is used by God to complete his church. Yet, these stones are living. There is a spiritual activity, a spiritual interest, evident in the stones of the building. They throb with the life of Christ in them.

The whole of the building of living stones, finds its source of strength, its shape and character, in Christ--Who is called the "living stone" in verse. 4. The thought is taken

from Isaiah 28:16, "Therefore thus saith the Lord, God, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation ~~stone~~ a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation; he that believeth shall not make haste." Jesus is here called that living Stone. He has life in and of Himself. For Jesus is God. As such, and because of His perfect payment on the cross, He gives life to His people. The living stones in this building of God receive all of their life out of Christ.

Therefore also Peter speaks of that Stone, Jesus, in such a glowing manner. He is Cosen of God. In Colossians 1:15 He is called, "The firstborn of every creature...." God determined eternally that Christ would be the very heart, the center, of the building which God would erect--the church.

This same stone is indeed precious, or, of great value or cost. He is God Himself come into our flesh. One could not think of anything more costly than that. God Himself will come to deliver His people. That is the very corner stone of the church.

Now it is true that a great many today will deny all of this. Natural man will "disallow" all of this. He scoffs at it. Man insists that Jesus is not the kind of deliverer they want nor need. The Jews indeed wanted a Messiah, but an earthly one who would deliver them from the hated Roman authority. Many others today do not want the Jesus of Scripture. These object to His centrality. These would deny His absolute power. Many would question whether He actually and fully saves from death. Many hate the idea of a cross of atonement. So these "disallow" or deny Him.

But others come to Him. This "coming" represents not that first time when a person believes and confesses Christ's Name. There is rather a constant coming to Christ. The Christian sees in Him all that one needs for his spiritual life. And such an one receives the constant blessing of Christ.

These are built up into that spiritual house and into a holy priesthood. The verse presents a strange figure: a house seems to turn into an holy priesthood. Yet the passage emphasizes that the church is no mere building--but living, active members who are dedicated to God. These would glorify and serve Him at all times. And these offer up spiritual sacrifices. These "sacrifices" are myself, my family, and all that I possess. All of this is presented before God in thanksgiving and gratitude.

And the sacrifices offered to God are acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. God beholds the works of His people as the fruit of Christ's work in them. God is pleased when such works are seen.

Verses 6 through 8 return to the idea of the chief corner stone--Jesus Christ. The idea of a corner stone is, perhaps, somewhat difficult for us today to understand. A corner stone is at best a decorative item in a building--usually inserted when the building is near completion. However, this was not always so. In Peter's day, the corner stone was the most important part of the building. It determined the size and shape of the building. The lines of the building were regulated by the kind of corner stone it had.

So is Christ the corner stone of the church. He is ordained by God in His eternal plan to be the heart and center of the Church. The Church exists to glorify Christ. It serves to reveal the glory and beauty of the corner stone. Without this corner stone, the Church could not exist at all. Therefore, also, the church must always proclaim the glory of its own corner stone.

And when one examines the church, he beholds how that indeed the church reflects in every way the wonder of Christ's work. The church exists not by the faithfulness nor the worthiness of the members. It is not man who gathers the church--nor man who determines who shall be included in that church. All of this is Christ's work. The foundation stone determines the building.

And what does Christ do as corner stone? He redeems His people. He fully pays for their sins. He sends forth His Spirit to work in their hearts. He causes His Word to be preached in order to call sinners to repentance. He preserves His people so that they endure to the end.

Thus Christ determines the very lines of His church. He determines who shall be gathered--and what their place shall be within that building. He determines the beauty and glory of His church. Thus this church exists not for itself, but is the result of the cornerstone--and exists for the glory of that corner stone.

But many do not appreciate the position of this Corner stone. In Ps. 118:22 we read: "The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner." The point is: certain builders refused this corner stone. Those builders are all such as would erect a form of a building without Christ. The Jews of Jesus' day tried that. They would erect a building

for their own purposes. These would have an earthly kingdom with the glory, perhaps, of that which David had as king. These would continue their temple worship and their sacrifices. But they had no place for Christ, the corner stone. They would have nothing to do with a Savior who attained to His kingdom in the way of suffering and death.

But such is also the attitude of so many today. Many would build a world-kingdom with man as supreme. These believe that they can make a utopia here below--but without the Christ. Even many within churches have that terribly sinful notion that Christ's cross does not represent payment for sin. These too would make a kingdom which is purely earthly.

All these stumble at that corner stone Who is Christ. He is a stone of stumbling to them. This means not merely that they trip over Him, but upon Him they are dashed to pieces. And He is to them a rock of offence, or a large mass of rock which serves as the tongue of a trap. These "stumble" over Him and are consumed in the death-trap.

These are indeed disobedient. They reject the truth. They refuse to recognize its validity. And they are consumed before God.

And verse 8 points out that even "unto this they were appointed". The question is: who appointed these to this destiny? The only answer can be: God did. God determined that these disobedient ones would have such a destiny. I am aware that many would object to such testimony of Scripture. Yet its teaching is plain. God has determined even to use the wicked actions of men to serve His wonderful purpose of gathering a people to glory in Christ. God used the wicked actions of men in crucifying the Christ, to serve His purpose of redeeming His people from their sins. Peter said something similar in Acts 4:27 and 28. All of this shows the control of God over all events--so that things can never happen as accidents. God determined all things.

But for those that believe, Jesus is all that God's Word says. He is indeed the full foundation of God's building. And those that believe shall never be "confounded" in Him; they shall never be made ashamed because of Him. These do not stumble over this cornerstone, but see in Him all that which they need. These believe that He is the strength and defence of His building, the church. They know that in the midst of greatest trials, they shall be secure--for they rest on that cornerstone. Jesus will never forsake His people. He will fulfill His Word. Nations shall pass away. This world will have its end. But His church shall abide forevermore. What a wonderful cornerstone is ours!

Now the apostle Peter returns to the pilgrims or strangers who recognize the value and preciousness of Christ, the Corner stone of His church. And he calls attention to them in striking contrast to those mentioned in verses 7 and 8. There were the disobedient who stumble upon the Stone who is Christ. But...so he begins verses 9 and 10...but you are a chosen generation, etc. These who are so beautifully described are the elect strangers who are addressed in this letter. In verse 9 they are called a "chosen generation" a "royal priesthood", an "holy nation", and a "peculiar people". The words are quite similar in meaning, though there is a distinction between them. A "generation" emphasizes a certain line of birth--from father to son. A "nation" points to the unity of a particular group as it is bound together politically. A "people" suggests that this is a group in distinction from many other groups.

But each term suggests the fact of unity of these elect strangers. These are not just another earthly nation. Here we have presented the people of God, the church, as they stand forth a unique people. Elect strangers are not a motley crowd; they are rather a unified body.

Peter reminds us in verse 10 that it was not always so. These were not always a people. He refers to Hosea 2:23 in the Old Testament where the prophet said, "And I will have mercy upon her that had not obtained mercy; and I will say to them which were not my people, Thou art my people." Such is the case with God's church. Originally they were a part of divided, and wicked, men. They were of those divided by wars, crime, corruption of every sort. They were born into the world as sinners--dead sinners. But now God has fashioned them as His people. God unites them in Jesus Christ that they may serve as His people in the midst of this wicked world.

This people whom God has formed has a unique office: they are prophets, priests, and kings of the living God. Peter says that these are a "royal priesthood" in verse 9. The idea of a priest is that he sacrifices before God. So did the priests in Israel in the Old Testament. But especially a priest is one who serves--serves God with all his being. That is true for the Christian--as priest he serves God alone with all that he is and all that he has. But at the same time, this is a "royal" priesthood. There is in him that which is "royal"--he is a king. God makes His people to have proper rule over all that which God entrusts to their care.

And these are prophets--for they "show forth His praise". Each child of God speaks the Word of God and extols God's great Name.

In this glorious office, Christians have been restored through Christ. Adam in Paradise

was such an officebearer of God. When he sinned, he lost that office. Now God has restored it through the perfect work of Jesus.

Peter continues by contrasting the position of the Christian before regeneration and conversion and after these. Before, they were in darkness--the darkness of spiritual ignorance of course. But more--they were in the darkness of sin and death. They had been very really separated from God and all of His blessings.

Nor did they have mercy. "Mercy" is God's desire to lift a sinful people and raise them to the heights of glory. But wicked man did not have that. These did not even deserve mercy. They had rebelled against God.

But God brought these into His own marvelous light. These were called by God--and when God calls, something happens. God called these to new life, to repentance and confession. He did not interview the sinner--to find out if he was willing to enter the light. But powerfully God called these from darkness and thus brought them into light. So Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. Lazarus came from the grave at the call of Christ. Thus also one is brought to the light of fellowship and blessing before God.

And the result is that these experience the rich mercies of God. He desired to bless them--and now He has. Thus these are made a "peculiar" people. They are not "odd" or "strange", but a "unique" people. Of all men on the earth, these are distinctly God's. He purchased them through Christ's blood--thus they become God's possession.

These, according to verse 9, have known now the "praises" or virtues of God. They have seen the love of God shown in Christ who dies on the cross. They see the justice and righteousness of God manifest through that same cross. All of these perfections of God they have themselves experienced when they were saved.

And these they now "show forth". Isaiah says in 43:21, "They shall show forth my praise." What else can one do? He who has enjoyed such blessings of God must necessarily tell that of which God has done. This is done in the church, through the preaching. It is done also in speaking one to another; in encouraging one another in the way of the Lord. The Christian seeks to find every opportunity to declare the greatness and glory of His God.

So often we fail to live up to this calling. We don't want to offend anyone. We don't want to cause ecclesiastical ripples. Yet remember the calling of those who are brought

into the light of God. They are to walk as children of that light. They are to show forth the wonderful works of God--no matter what the consequences. These may face persecution. They may face death because of their testimony. But as a special people of God, these will want to praise and glorify the name of their God in all things. Do we do this?

Next time I expect to discuss with you the remaining verses of I Peter 2. Tell then, may God bless and keep His people through Jesus Christ our Lord. Til