

1 Peter 1:22-2:25 – Chapter Study

INTRODUCTION

The Apostle Peter probably wrote this letter in 64 or 65 BC when the Church was *beginning* to feel the heat of persecution.

He knew that when people are feeling pressed and know their cause is right, they can become *defensive* and end up using *force* to push back against the opposition.

So he wrote this letter to move his readers to look beyond the *experience* of suffering to the ultimate purposes of God *behind* it.

Peter had the example of Christ who never reacted to evil *with* evil but instead humbly submitted to the Father and sought to turn each event to God's glory.

So the theme of this letter is the *hope* we have in the over-ruling purposes of God.

Peter regularly calls his readers to *submit*, rather than react;

- 1) They are to remain humble and gentle in the face of suffering
- 2) And while their enemies may mean their destruction, *they* must look to the higher hand of God who will use the experience of suffering to mold and shape them into the image of Christ.

It's an amazing thing to realize that the early Christian community well heeded Peter's words and when persecution came, they maintained a reputation for holiness that had a profound impact on the lost.

Many thousands were won to faith in Christ precisely because Christians did *not* do what comes naturally when faced with suffering and persecution.

They didn't react and form armed bands that went out to do away with their opponents.

Instead they loved and prayed for their enemies – just as Jesus taught them.

And instead of toning down the very doctrines that got them into trouble, they proclaimed them all the more boldly.

This abiding hope and confidence in God ended up convincing

many of even their critics that the content of the Christian faith was true.

And it seemed the more Christians were put to death, the more came to faith.

For every Christian who died in the fires of persecution, 3 rose up in his/her place.

A common saying at this time was that the blood of the saints was the seed of the Church.

We'll pick it up at v. 22 of chapter 1 as that's where we left off last Wednesday . . .

CHAPTER 1

22Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, **23**having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides **forever, 24**because [and now Peter quotes from Isaiah 40]

“All flesh is as grass, And all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, And its flower falls away, 25 But the word of the LORD endures forever.”

Then he ends v. 25 with his own comment -

Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you.

V. 22 is a classic example of how translating from Greek into English is often a difficult proposition.

He says –

Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren,

This is something they've already done; they've already been made clean by obedience to the Holy Spirit and that work of change has been made evident by their love for one another.

Based on this evidence of being born again – Peter exhorts them to continue on and not grow faint in the expression of communal love -

love one another fervently with a pure heart,

When we first come to faith in Christ – a radical change is made.

We get a whole new orientation.

Where as reading the Bible was a bore before, suddenly we can't get enough of it.

Prayer takes on a new dimension and sense of connection with God.

Praise & Worship, which before just sounded like some poor quality singing, becomes the joyful expression of love and adoration to God.

And our attitude toward Christians goes through a dramatic change.

These people we once thought were geeks become family.

But after a while, as we get to know people better and realize that Christians are people in process and often just as messed up as we are, that initial love for them can begin to dim.

The novelty of being a new creature in Christ and part of a new family begins to age.

And we can find our sense of devotion to the community of Christ cooling.

Peter is saying here that their new birth was proven by all the changes that took place in them when they first came to faith in Christ, specially their love for one another.

They must make sure that love doesn't fade or become corrupted by carnality.

No doubt, Peter was thinking of that story that's told in Acts 5, when Ananias and his wife Sapphira lied to the Holy Spirit and were cut down on the spot by the sovereign hand of God.

In those early days of the church, the love of the disciples was so intense, they were selling their excess possessions and lands and distributing to the needy among them.

When Ananias and Sapphira saw the attention the rich were getting when they turned over large chunks of land, they decided they wanted some of that praise and attention and sold

a piece of land and brought the proceeds to the feet of the Apostles.

What they didn't disclose was that they had set aside a portion of it to keep for themselves.

When they gave it, they said it was the full price and Peter pronounced doom upon them for thinking they could lie to God.

Ananias and Sapphira were guilty of an impure love and devotion – one that was a pretense to personal gain.

Peter exhorts his readers to maintain the things that marked their first faith – passionate love and devotion to God and one another.

What a timely word for us tonight!

How critical that we stir up love among the brethren! For without love – it's all pointless!

Love is the real fruit of the Spirit, and without love, everything else we accomplish is empty.

CCO has a reputation for being a solid Bible ministry – and we can rejoice in that.

But rather we had a reputation for holy love!

The fact is, we've garnered something of a reputation for being unwelcoming and less than warm.

Not a few people have come and attended for some time, waiting to make connection with the fellowship, but their hope and expectation has gone unrealized, and they've moved on.

Truly, if we'd reached out to these people with genuine love, CCO would today be one of the largest churches in this County.

Very simply, we need to do what Peter says here.

We need to lower our guard and reach out to one another in genuine, sincere love.

Not thinking about what it's going to cost us – not holding anything back in reserve.

Peter says –

love one another fervently with a pure heart,

When you hear the word “fervent”, what do you picture?

The Greek word means to “*stretch out*” to “*extend*.”

Peter is saying we must go “out of our way” to love others.

Not just when it’s convenient, not just when it suits us.

This is a love that stretches itself in the service of others.

It goes outside itself and into the needs of others.

If you’re a naturally shy person, you might think that being warm and welcoming is something people who are naturally that way are to do.

You leave the greeting ministry of the fellowship to those you deem are naturally extrovert.

This word is specially for you!

The ministry of love isn’t just for the out-going; it’s for all God’s people.

Let’s ask the Lord to add to our reputation as a solid Bible ministry the reputation that we are living out what we’re learning by loving one another.

In v. 23, Peter connects this kind of love for one another to the fact of our being born again . . .

23 **having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever,**

Our new life in Christ did not arise from anything within us; it came about as the result of a seed God planted in us.

That seed was planted through the preaching of the Gospel.

24 **because** [and now Peter quotes from Isaiah 40]

“All flesh is as grass, And all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, And its flower falls away, ²⁵ But the word of the LORD endures forever.”

Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you.

We must never underestimate the power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

What I mean is this – we must never short-sell the effect of our testimony and the simple facts of the content of the gospel

message.

The gospel, the message that Jesus died to pay for our sin & guilt and that He rose again to give us new life, is spiritual seed that goes into the human heart.

Whenever the good news is proclaimed, either in personal one on one conversation or from a crusade platform, it is like seed sown in the hearts of the lost and one day will produce a harvest.

Peter contrasts the words of man with the Word of God here.

The word of man will fail and fall short – but the Word of God endures forever – it never fails – NEVER!

One interpretive sidelight before we move on:

Some people try to make a big deal about the difference between the two Greek words for “Word” - *rhema* & *logos*.

But here in vs. 23 & 25, Peter uses both words to refer to the *exact* same thing.

The two words *sometimes* have subtle differences, but the difference between them is *no where near* significant enough to make any kind of deep theological conclusions from them.

In Classical Greek usage, they were virtually interchangeable.

CHAPTER 2

¹Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, ²as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, ³if indeed you have tasted that the Lord *is* gracious.

Peter says that if his readers have indeed been born again, they must put off the fruit of their previous lives and instead seek to grow in the qualities of their new life.

And just as the Word of God was the seed that produced new life, that new life is sustained by *more* of the Word of God.

But he is NOT encouraging them to remain spiritual babies!

He is not telling them to stay on the bottle.

Rather, he is saying that just as a newborn *craves* milk, so they ought to *crave* the Word of God.

I've noticed that it's a general spiritual maxim that what a person is

won *by*, they are won to!

What I mean is that there are a lot of *methods* of evangelism out there today.

Preachers, teachers, and evangelists use all kinds of bait to get people to “make a decision.”

Some appeal to greed and preach a message of prosperity.

Others appeal to the desire for fun and use heavy doses of entertainment.

But what you win a person *with*, is what you win them *to*.

Peter said they’d been won by the Word – and reminds them to stay focused on the Word because that’s how they will grow and mature.

A ministry that uses entertainment to win people will have to keep turning up the level of fun and excitement or the people will get bored and turn away.

When they first start, they may make a big splash and draw a lot of attention and initially big numbers –

But after a while, the machine will need more maintenance than the people are willing to invest and it will grind to a halt.

A ministry that focuses on the novel and the latest and greatest thing the Spirit may draw a big and curious crowd as the dramatic is seen –

But if novelty is the attraction, then the leaders will have to keep coming up with something new – and this will inevitably lead to the increasingly bizarre.

A ministry that promises health and wealth appeals to the flesh and will attract many –

But when the promises of wealth and health go unrealized for all but those at the top who are profiting off the gullibility of their followers – the people will fall away with the feeling of having been used.

A ministry that uses the means of the Word of God will probably not grow *quickly*, but it will grow *consistently*.

People will be won to faith in Christ as opposed to faith in faith, or faith in fun, or faith in the spectacular.

And this faith will grow because they’re getting a steady diet of the Word of God rather than endless stories and new revelations.

As they grow, the corporate expression of their fellowship grows and the work of ministry multiplies and expands.

4Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God *and* precious, **5**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. **6**Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture, [he quotes Isaiah 28:16]

“Behold, I lay in Zion - A chief cornerstone, elect, precious, And he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame.”

7Therefore, to you who believe, *He is* precious; but to those who are disobedient, [and now he quotes from Psalm 118:22]

“The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone,”

8and [here Peter quotes Isaiah 8:14]

“A stone of stumbling And a rock of offense.”

They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed.

This is a great passage in which Peter describes the Church as being a Spiritual Temple.

This temple has as its cornerstone nothing less than the person of Jesus Christ.

And it's constructed of living stones – each one being a follower of Jesus.

Peter draws his imagery from 3 OT passages which refer to stones and speak of them prophetically as being fulfilled in Jesus.

In the ancient world, major buildings were constructed of stone.

The larger the building, the larger the blocks.

For instance, Solomon's temple was made of marble blocks that were as large 15 feet across!

They weighed many tons!

But in any structure constructed of stone blocks, the most important block of all was the *cornerstone*.

This was the stone that was laid *first* and provided the strength and integrity of the entire building.

You see, the cornerstone was the block the masons used to draw the lines for their walls.

The corners of the cornerstone had to be absolutely straight and square, because as additional blocks were added, they used the *face* of the cornerstone as their *level*.

Thus, the shape of the cornerstone determined the shape the entire building.

Peter says that the church is a *living building*, made up of living stones, in which the Spirit of God abides.

Each and every Christian is one of those stones, and our lives are laid out according to the shape and pattern laid down by Jesus.

He is the *level* by which the whole building is constructed.

Last Sunday I began the message by saying the word “Christian” was coined by the critics of the early church because the followers of Jesus were *just like Him*; they were “like-Christ” which is what the word “Christian” means.

Jesus is our plumb-line, our rule; the mark and measure of our lives and living.

This is why the series we’re doing right now on Sundays on the Nature of Jesus is so important.

Just as Jesus provides the plumb & rule for our *individual* lives, He also forms the foundation for all of us together as the Church.

Peter’s emphasis here is not our *individuality* but rather, the *corporate unity* we have in Christ.

There are many models for the Church, many ideas on how it ought to operate and what it ought to be about.

But any idea, any vision & mission that isn’t drawn directly from the person and work of Jesus Christ is no real church at all.

Really, Peter describes the bottom line for the Church right here in v. 5 . . .

5 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.

The Church, the real thing, is a spiritual building that is comprised of individuals who've been born again by the Spirit of God.

God quarried them out of the pit of sin and cemented them by grace into a heavenly structure.

Peter then shifts the picture a bit and speaks about what takes place in that spiritual temple.

The living stones become priests whose task is to offer to God service that glorifies Him.

A priest's duty is two-fold: He represents people to God, and God to the people.

In all things, as he stands before people, he seeks to bring forth the mind, heart, and counsel of the Lord.

And as he stands before God, he brings intercession and a request for blessing on behalf of the people.

This is precisely what Jesus did when He came – and this is exactly what the Church needs to be about today.

The very best way to accomplish this is the faithfully teach and preach God's Word to the people, and to pray before the throne of God that His kingdom might come and His will be done on earth in the lives of those we lift before Him.

In v. 7, Peter quotes from Psalm 118, a passage which Jesus used of Himself when confronted by the chief priests in the temple.

Once again they came to Him with questions that were aimed at tripping Him up in the sight of the people.

They were always angling for something they could use to condemn Him.

So they asked Him by whose authority He did what He did and said what He said.

After answering them He went on to show how their opposition to Him was fulfilling a passage of scripture they well knew – Psalm 118, which was clearly Messianic.

“The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone,”

The chief priests knew that this spoke of the coming Messiah and how He would be rejected; but they had always thought it

ludicrous and condemned those who would be so stupid and blind as to stand in the way of God.

Yet here they were, the very object of their own scorn and ridicule!!!!!!

Peter's point is to comfort his readers with the knowledge that the source of persecution they are enduring and will face in ever increasing intensity is those who've rejected Christ.

They stand outside the work God is doing and are trying to stop it – but they cannot succeed because God Himself is for them and against them.

Peter goes on now and gives an incredible description of those who comprise the Church.

⁹But 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; ¹⁰who once were not a people but *are* now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.

While this *includes* Jews, it's aimed more at Gentiles.

Before they came to faith in Christ, they were nobodies as far as the covenant and purposes of God were concerned.

But faith in Christ has brought them into the very family of God and made them part of His household.

Look at the descriptive terms Peter uses here for the Community of the Redeemed:

1) You *are* a chosen generation • For generations the Jews had constituted the chosen people of God, but now the chosen are those who've come to faith in Christ.

God chose you! That ought to thrill you right down to your socks! To get the faintest glimpse of how wonderful this is, think back to your elementary school days when they chose up teams to play some game.

The first one's picked were the best players – the ones who could contribute the most to winning.

Then as the selection went on it got down to the weaker players until it was the players no one really wanted.

You are God's first round choice for His choosing took place before the foundation of the world.
God had you in mind before He ever hung the stars in space!
He chose you before you were.
And together, you and I, along with all the saints from every age constitute a generation, a group of people who are chosen by God!

2) You are a royal priesthood • Not only are we priests, as we've already seen, but we are royal priests.

In Jesus Christ the roles of prophet, priest and King have all been united.

Our faith in Him places us IN HIM, and that means we've been initiated into a priesthood that is also tied to the throne.

Christian – you are a member of the heavenly royal family!

The angels in heaven cannot claim that privilege!

We are not only priests, we are princes and princesses who are destined to sit with Christ upon His throne – as it says in Revelation 3:21

3) You are a holy nation • Prior to Christ the focus of God's redemptive attention was the nation and people of Israel.

Just as the Jews were the chosen people, the scope of their choosing was the borders and land of Israel.

But with the coming of Christ, the scope of God's redemptive attention switched from the nation of Israel to the Church.

Now – let me be clear, I am NOT saying the Church has taken over for Israel or that God is through with Israel & the Jewish people – on the contrary!

God will once again return His focus to the people and nation of Israel and is even now setting the world stage for that day.

But for now – the focus of God's attention is the Church, whenever and where ever, and whoever they are – regardless of ethnic or national origin.

4) You are His own special people • Peter caps this idea of the Church being a unique community that's the focus of God's attention.

Here he uses words that refer to the fundamental difference between the lost and the saved.

His point is that the difference between someone who is lost and

someone who is saved is far and away more significant than the differences that exist between people of various ethnic and national origins.

Peter's main point in all of this is the *dramatic unity* that marks all of God's people!

We are one generation, one priesthood, one nation, one people!

We are chosen, we are royalty, we are holy, and we are special!

Friends - This is the Church! This is who and what we are.

We must strive to ever more find the reality of this lived out in our relations with other Christians, specially the members of other congregations!

Peter says that our unity is to be lived out as we -

proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;

I sure hope that praise and worship is something you look forward to.

It's in worship and praise that what we are learning finds primary application.

For the first-fruit of our lives ought to be to the Lord – just as the first fruits of the fields of Israel were to be brought to the temple as an offering.

¹¹Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, ¹²having 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.

To be a “chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own special people,” means to be an alien to this world's system. Peter addresses his readers as pilgrims and travelers, people who are just passing through this world to a heavenly homeland.

Because they *are* just passing through, they have to be careful they don't get snagged by things that would slow their momentum toward heaven.

Many years ago, two friends and I went on a backpacking trip in the Sierra.

Because we wanted to find the best possible fishing we got out our

maps and looked for a lake that was as far as possible *away* from the nearest trail.

Our thinking was that the more inaccessible the lake, the better the fishing.

So we picked a lake and had to do many miles of cross country hiking to get there.

It was a harrowing experience and extremely dangerous and the telling of the full tale is quite exciting.

In one portion of the hike *out* from the lake, we only went 3 miles in an entire day!

Normally, we hiked 12 to 15 miles a day – but that day, we made it only 3 miles.

The reason why was because we spent most of the day wading through thick branches of trees and thorny bushes.

The canyon we were in had such steep sides we were forced to walk along the banks of a small river which was choked with trees and shrubs.

We spent hours never touching the ground – walking instead on the branches and fighting our way through the growth.

Many times, we'd run into such a thick clump of greenery, it would give a little and then fling us backward onto our rear.

We came through with our clothes in shreds and our arms and legs filled with splinters and thorns.

The entire day's hike was one continual battle against the clutching, grasping plants of the High Sierra.

We were travelers, but it seemed the mountains were conspiring to make us permanent settlers.

That's the picture here in v. 11.

As Christians, this world is not our home – heaven is our Home.

We're just passing through, and we need to be careful that we don't allow ourselves to get snagged and thrown back by some worldly growth that would seek to trip us up or hinder our progress.

Peter knew that the *difference* between the saved and the lost was the main thing that was leading to persecution and the suffering it brings.

So he encourages them to not weaken this *different-ness* so they might duck opposition.

Rather – they must be diligent to maintain a holy lifestyle so that when they *are* opposed, at least their opponents will have to give grudging acknowledgement of their godliness.

13Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake, whether to the king as supreme, **14**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. **15**For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men—**16**as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God. **17**Honor all *people*. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.

Peter is clear and concise in regard to his counsel to believers who are suffering persecution.

They must submit humbly and quietly to every ordinance of man, to the degree that it does not violate the higher law of God.

I want to take a little time with this tonight because what Peter says here finds tremendous application to today and our setting.

As I’ve already mentioned, Peter wrote this about 64 or 65 A.D.. [\[1\]](#)
Its theme of submission despite unjust suffering remained relevant to the church for several hundred years.

During this period Christians experienced significant persecution.

A letter written about 110 A.D. by a regional administrator named Pliny, asked the Emperor Trajan “whether it is the mere *name* of Christian which is punishable, even if innocent of crime, or rather the crimes associated with the names.”

Trajan’s answer instructs Pliny not to accept anonymous charges against anyone as a Christian, or to “hunt them down.”

But he says that “if [Christians] are brought before [him] and the charge against them [that they are in fact Christians] is proved, they must be punished.”

Less than 50 years after Peter wrote this letter, to bear the name “Christian” in the Roman Empire was considered a *capital*

offense.

What a need for Peter, aware of growing hostility even in the 60's, to write and show believers how to live in times when maintaining allegiance to Jesus means suffering, discrimination, ridicule, and even death.

So Peter begins by laying a vital foundation.

To stand up to suffering the Christian must have a strong sense of his/her identity in Christ (1:3-2:10).

This is rooted first of all in a salvation granted to us by God (1:3-12), a salvation that leads us to a life of holiness, reverence, and genuine love (1:13-25).

In that life we serve our God as His chosen priesthood (2:1-10).

Our response to suffering must be made in view of who we are as God's people, for privilege brings with it responsibility.

And that responsibility is to live such *good lives* that even our opponents have to give grudging acknowledgement to it.

That "good life" is one marked by a submissive respect for others and human institutions, despite the fact that they may treat us unfairly (2:13-3:12).

Should persecution come even though we do nothing but good, we are to trust God and remember that Christ *also* suffered unjustly—with blessed results (3:13-4:11).

Throughout church history this letter has spoken to thousands who have remained committed to Christ despite persecution.

Peter has more to say about suffering than any other NT or OT book.

In fact, he uses 7 different words to describe suffering!

He reminds us that God uses suffering to purify our faith, and help us experience His own presence in our lives.

And - God uses our suffering as a witness to the world—a witness which will bring God, and us, glory when Jesus comes again.

[2]

How this all speak to us today is this – there's a growing *militancy* in the Christian community in the US that ought to be a bit alarming if we take Peter seriously and honor this as the Word of God.

As the world oppresses and opposes the Church, there's been the

tendency in some circles to use *political force* to fight back. Evangelical Christianity has been courted by one major political party and held in derision by the other.

It is a sad day when the Cause of Christ is cast as a political agenda for Jesus said His kingdom is not of this world.

And when the people of His day tried to pressure Him into adopting the worldly means of power to attain His throne, He resisted.

The crowds eventually became so disaffected with His means, they turned against Him and consented to His crucifixion! It is ever the task of the People of God to stand as a Prophet *against* the age, not to stand with it and sanctify its desires.

The OT prophets were always running afoul of the political leader because they dared to hold him accountable to the Word and Will of God.

In the OT, we read of those *false* prophets who buddied up to the king and his cronies for the sake of influence and gain.

They were always ready to give a word of blessing and favor to the king – but the true prophets were sent with the message of rebuke and correction.

Even the prophet Nathan went to *David* with the hard word of rebuke when he sinned with Bathsheba and tried to cover it up with a conspiracy to commit murder.

The point is this, the Church must never buddy up with the world and use worldly means to accomplish the objectives of the Kingdom of God.

Instead, it is the duty of the Community of Christ to stand as a witness to the world, a witness which runs contrary to the nations and will inevitably result in hostility and persecution.

Make no mistake – though this nation was founded by godly men on biblical principles, the US is NOT the Kingdom of God.

It never has been and never will be.

And while we have a duty as stewards to be good citizens, we must never attempt to use force of any kind to accomplish the objectives of the Kingdom of God.

Apart from the return of Christ, in all likelihood, our nation will continue down the road of destruction and ruin it has been on now

for the generation.

And what Peter writes here will need to be dusted off and re-appropriated by the people of God.

If things continue as they are, it won't be too long before Christians are persecuted for nothing more than bearing the name of Christ, just as they did in Peter's day.

But that doesn't mean that all is lost!

For it was against that backdrop that Peter saw the potential for the difference between the world and the Kingdom to be most obviously and powerfully demonstrated.

What Peter said to them, the Spirit says to us tonight –

15 For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men—¹⁶as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God.

17 Honor all *people*. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.

[1] This section adapted from the Victor Bible Background Commentary

[2] End of above section.