

“The Church’s True Identity” (part 1)

1 Peter 2:4-10

Perhaps the most important thing about you is how you answer the question, “Who am I?” It is a question that gets to the heart of your identity. Our identity is where we find meaning, stability, and our sense of purpose in life.

I am afraid that far too many within the church are suffering from an identity crisis. We are constantly trying to seek our identity in people and things other than Christ. We are reaping the consequences of a church full of people who've forgotten who they are, or haven't ever really discovered it to begin with. Instead of living out of the fullness of a relationship with God, they are trying to live out of the empty pursuit of lesser things. They have equated Christianity more or less to things that they do or don't do rather than who they are.

When we forget who we are in Christ, we try to fill the void by placing our identity in other things as substitutes.

How you answer the question, “Who am I?” has far reaching consequences. The reason for this is that God created humanity in His own image in order to reflect that image and thereby glorify God. Fundamental to our existence is the fact that, just like a mirror, we reflect whatever ‘god’ has a hold on our heart. Our allegiance follows our identity.

I want you to notice within these verses that Peter makes several identity statements about believers. If you count them all up, he makes seven or eight direct statements about who we are as the people of God. For those who under the pressure of persecution, who no doubt had been stripped of their comforts and conveniences, it was very important that they find their identity in Christ rather than their circumstances. Having nearly forgotten who they were as God's

beloved children, they were facing the the temptation to retreat back into a lifestyle that was less offensive to their unbelieving neighbors.

And so Peter writes to remind these struggling Christians of their true identity because they needed the security that comes from the knowledge of who they were in Christ. Without such confidence, they were sure to buckle under the weight of cultural pressure. The same thing is true for those of us living in the 21st century in today's culture.

Who are we as believers, according to Peter?

1. We are living stones in God's BUILDING (2:4-5a)

4—As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious,

5a—you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house,

Peter begins by saying, "As you come to him." Who is he referring to? A brief glance back up into verse 3 will reveal the 'him' mentioned here as none other than the Lord Jesus. These believers have personally tasted and seen that the Lord is good. They have come to Him in faith and trust.

The phrase 'as you come to him' not only implies their initial conversion, but also to their drawing nearer to Him in intimate, abiding, and personal fellowship.

"As You Come" - *translates a Greek verb that is a present participle; continually coming*

It is connected to the main verb in the sentence which is found in verse 5 so that it reads this way, "As you come to him...you are being built up." Peter's emphasis is that by drawing nearer to Christ, we are being built up in Christ. It is

a passive verb, meaning that Christ Jesus Himself is the One who is doing the building up.

Though the verb is passive, it doesn't mean that we are!

Rather instead, we are to be active in our obedience. The Christian life is one of movement, not complacency. But even still, you and I must never be under the impression that we are the ones who are responsible for our own spiritual growth. It is God who does that. He is the One who is at work to make us more like His Son.

As we come to Him, He builds us up. You will notice that Peter uses a metaphor in the passage to describe the church's growth. The metaphor is that of 'stones' used in a building project. God's people are like a building, and Jesus is the solid rock upon which the building rests.

First century building methods would often use a process of cutting new stones from quarries to fit them perfectly in place. However, a faster and less expensive way of gathering materials was to use stones from the ruins of toppled buildings. A stonemason would chisel them into the appropriate shape and then fit them into the new buildings.

Peter uses these practices as a metaphor for the way that God is building up His spiritual house with 'living stones.' Whether the stones come from new Gentile quarries or from the old structures of Judaism, they both require some cutting, some chiseling, and shaping them into a new structure. And the whole structure rests upon Christ.

As he writes, perhaps Peter is going back in his mind to a unforgettable conversation that he once had with Jesus, a conversation that was prompted by

a question. In response to the question Jesus asks, Peter had made a confession.

Matthew 16:13—“Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, ‘Who do people say that the Son of Man is?’”

Matthew 16:14—“And they said, ‘Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah of one of the prophets.’”

Matthew 16:15—“He said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’”

Matthew 16:16—“Simon Peter replied, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’”

Matthew 16:17—“And Jesus answered him, ‘Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.’”

Matthew 16:18—“And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”

Jesus changes Simon’s name to ‘Petros,’ which means stone. Yet He promises that He will build up His church on the ‘petra’ or massive rock, and that rock is Himself.

He is the Living Stone

Peter says, “As you come to Him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God, He is chosen and precious.” We have come to Christ, who is the Living Stone upon which we place all of our faith and confidence. A stone is something that denotes strength and stability.

These are two two things that are necessary for living in a corrupt culture. We need strength that comes from outside of ourselves, and we need spiritual stability in a climate that is all over the map when it comes to morality, ethics, and values. As believers, we are given such strength and stability in Christ our Rock. He is the Rock of ages.

God has always desired to be the strength and stability of His scattered people living in the midst of a pagan world. In the Old Testament, He gave His people a tangible illustration of this truth.

When the Israelites were complaining of thirst, Moses cried out to the Lord in the fear that the people were about to stone him. God told him to take his staff in his hand:

Exodus 17:6—“Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb, and you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it, and the people will drink.”

Rather than Moses being crushed by the people’s stones, God’s own presence would be on a rock, that when it was struck, water would gush forth from the rock so that it might quench the thirst of God’s people.

1 Corinthians 10:4—“For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ.”

Because He is the Living Stone in whom we come to place our faith and confidence, Peter says that we also like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house.

He is the Corner Stone

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.

Not only is Jesus the Living Stone in whom we trust, but He is also the Corner Stone upon whom we rest.

Ephesians 2:19-21 — “So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.”

Peter reaches back into the Old Testament and shows how it has always been the plan of God to build a spiritual house on the cornerstone of His own choosing. You will notice that two times the phrase, ‘chosen and precious,’ is used to describe the Father’s choice of the Son.

In verse 6, he quotes directly from the prophet Isaiah:

Isaiah 28:16— “Therefore thus says the Lord God, ‘Behold, I am the one who has laid as a foundation in Zion, a stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, of a sure foundation: Whoever believes in him will not be in haste.’”

If you study that passage, you will discover that Isaiah’s message is one of judgment on those who who disobey and refuse to believe. Isaiah encourages the people to not put their trust in foreign alliances or in military strength, but only in the Lord who will raise up His elect cornerstone.

The word ‘cornerstone’ that Peter uses describes a special stone that was used by a master stonemason that was used to set all the proper angles for a building.

It basically served as the building's plumb line that established the precise symmetry of the entire structure. The cornerstone would be the first stone that was laid in a project, and it had to be set perfectly because it would be the reference points for all the other stones that would follow.

In order for God's spiritual house to be perfect, the main cornerstone had to be flawless. Notice in verses 4 and 6 that Peter says the cornerstone is 'chosen and precious.'

“Chosen” — *word is 'eklekton' and means selected; called out and elected from among others*

“Precious” — *means costly, highly prized, or rare*

The only way to become part of this spiritual house that God is building for Himself is through faith in His chosen, ordained means. There is one Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, and only one spiritual house, His church. Jesus is the Cornerstone who holds it all together. The only way to become part of the structure is to be built upon the very Cornerstone Himself.

Peter says that whoever believes in Him will not be put to shame. Some translations use the word 'disappointed.' The word carries the idea of being deceived after having placed confidence in someone. It is the notion of placing your hopes in someone and then having those hopes dashed to pieces. (illus. of being let down)

Most of us live our lives totally unaware of what we are really placing our confidence in until a change occurs, often in the form of pain and hardship. When a person is faced with struggle, it can lead to a crisis as his marriage,

children, appearance, wealth, career, or treasured possession crumbles under the weight of having been worshiped as if it were the cornerstone.

IDOLS—Items, Duties, Others, Longings, Sufferings (credit Mark Driscoll)

Items

Sometimes we try to make a cornerstone out of what we own—vehicles, clothing, tech, other possessions. If your possessions determine your identity, then brand name matters. When items are a god, we will often compare ourselves to others.

Duties

Life is filled with various duties and responsibilities—school work, job requirements, ministry obligations. Our duties can rightly be a way we worship God or wrongly be a god we worship. When we try to make a cornerstone out of our work, we will end up sorely disappointed. Personal success becomes our standard bearer.

Others

We are wired for relationship. God created us as relational beings. It is always a good thing to have others in our lives so long as they don't become a god. Whether it be a spouse, a parent, or a child. Sometimes we become so codependent upon someone else that the person becomes a functional savior. Others cannot be the cornerstone.

Longings

These are our hopes and dreams, our aspirations for life. All of us have something that we are looking forward to, yet when these longings become the functional cornerstone of our lives, we become governed by our circumstances.

Our desires, when unchecked, can lead us away from God. Be sure that certain longings are not your cornerstone.

Sufferings

Our hurts in life, the trauma that we face, the painful ordeal that we are in. We suffer emotionally as we wound others and as they wound us. We suffer financially as we try to make ends meet. We suffer mentally from the pressures of day to day living. We suffer relationally as our friends and family betray us. If we are not careful, we can allow even the sufferings of life to so identify us that it becomes all consuming. (Explain vs. Define)

Peter says that Jesus Christ is the true Cornerstone, and those who believe in Him will not be put to shame.

There is a promise to be found here! Those who place all of their confidence in the Lord Jesus will never be put to shame, and the reason is that He was put to shame in my place. No one who comes to Him and stakes all of their confidence upon Him will ever go away disappointed. As the one true Cornerstone, He alone can carry the weight of my needs. Christ alone is my strength and stability. This cannot be said of all the 'functional saviors' we run to.

He is the Rejected Stone

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,'

Peter says that we have come to Him, to the living stone who is rejected by men though chosen and precious in the sight of God. He is the stone that the builders rejected, but is now the cornerstone, the chief head of the corner upon which the whole spiritual house rests.

John 1:11-12—“He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.”

Now, the honor is for those who believe, who receive Christ as their Savior and are built up in Him.

He is the Stumbling Stone

8—and ‘A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense.’

The religious leaders of Israel rejected Jesus as their Messiah, and He became to them a stumbling stone.

“Offense” —*the word is ‘skandalon’ and refers to a stumbling block*

The scribes and Pharisees rejected Jesus because He didn’t fit into their preconceived notions of who their Messiah would be. He came to be the sacrifice for their sin, and His life was a rebuke to their own pride and self-righteousness. They wanted a crown, not a cross.

1 Corinthians 1:18-24—“For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, ‘I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.’ Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For the Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews

and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.”

Even to this day, Jesus Christ continues to be a ‘skandalon’ and a rock of offense. Many outright reject Him; others try to reshape Him to fit into their own version of Christianity.

They want a Jesus who coddles them, like a grandfatherly figure who sits in a rocking chair and doesn’t pose a threat. Yet the Jesus of the Bible flips the script. He turns over the religious tables, and He lavishly pours out His extravagant grace upon repentant sinners. But make no mistake—He demands your total allegiance.

Juan Sanchez — *“Jesus did not come to bring peace; he came to divide humanity between those who believe and those who disbelieve—between those who are built onto him, and those who stumble over him...Jesus is an offensive, divisive figure who demands total allegiance. He is the cornerstone, or he is nothing. He is not willing to be just one brick in our own building—he calls us to be built into his. And to everyone who hears that, it is either the most wonderful news or the most offensive.”*

The gospel deals a crushing blow to our pride.

As we come to Christ—to the Living Stone, Corner Stone, Rejected Stone, and Stumbling Stone—we ourselves are now living stones being built up into a spiritual house.

“Spiritual” - *translate the word ‘pneumatikos’ which is the same word we get our modern word ‘pneumatic’ from*

A 'pneumatic' instrument is one that makes use of pressurized air. Like a drill or a nail gun that you hook up to an air compressor. Without the power of the air flowing through it, the instrument is useless.

The church is a spiritual house which is being built upon Christ, in which dwells the Spirit of the Living God. God's house is no longer a physical dwelling, but one that is spiritual in nature. He has taken up residence in us!

Through coming to Christ, the Living Stone, we as believers are like living stones that are a part of God's spiritual house. Each one of us is important to Him, just like each and every brick is important to a home builder.

We are in the middle of a massive construction project as the Lord Jesus Christ is in the midst of building His church. Dead stones are being quarried from the pit of sin, and because Christ is the Living Stone, you and I are given new life and carefully and purposefully fitted into His house.

Chuck Swindoll — *“Each time someone trusts Christ as Savior, another stone is placed into that living, growing church. Please understand that becoming a stone in a building of countless stones doesn't detract from your significance. In fact, it enhances it! You represent a vital part in the outworking of God's plan. Without you, something would be missing. The wall would be weakened. Never underestimate your important part in the larger community of Christ.”*

Revelation 3:12—**“The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it, and I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name.”**

Time won't permit me to get into these other points. But perhaps it is best to close with a question—Do you know who you are? Really, who do you think you are? Who or what is your cornerstone? It will not be found in the acquisition of greater wealth. You won't find it in a career. It can't be purchased. Seeking it in a feeling, or the color of your skin, or in something else just won't do.

Where do you find stability and security? Your sense of identity can only be truly established as you come to Him, to Christ, to the Living and Corner Stone of the house.

*In Christ alone my hope is found
He is my light, my strength, my song
This Cornerstone, this solid ground
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm
What heights of love, what depths of peace
When fears are stilled, when strivings cease
My Comforter, my All in All
Here in the love of Christ I stand

In Christ alone, who took on flesh
Fullness of God in helpless babe
This gift of love and righteousness
Scorned by the ones He came to save
'Til on that cross as Jesus died
The wrath of God was satisfied
For every sin on Him was laid
Here in the death of Christ I live, I live

There in the ground His body lay*

*Light of the world by darkness slain
Then bursting forth in glorious Day
Up from the grave He rose again
And as He stands in victory
Sin's curse has lost its grip on me
For I am His and He is mine
Bought with the precious blood of Christ*

*No guilt in life, no fear in death
This is the power of Christ in me
From life's first cry to final breath
Jesus commands my destiny
No power of hell, no scheme of man
Can ever pluck me from His hand
Till He returns or calls me home
Here in the power of Christ I'll stand*

2. We are royal priests in God's TEMPLE

5b—to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

3. We are chosen people in God's POSSESSION

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.