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MINISTRIES

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Life in Exile: A Desire for God (1 Peter 2:1-10)

Welcome back to our verse-by-verse study through 1 Peter. Today, we’re going to start in chapter 2. In this section, Peter gives some instructions for how believers are to live and speaks about our identity in the Messiah.

But before we get started, here’s a quick summary of what we discussed last time:

1. Peter began his instructions by emphasizing the importance of getting your mind in the right place. He says, “**Prepare your minds for action**” and be “**sober-minded**” (1 Peter 1:13). Our mind—our thoughts and intentions—needs to govern our emotions and desires so that we can resist the enemy and stay focused on our calling.
2. That calling includes being holy in *all* our conduct. Peter appeals to Scripture, specifically Leviticus, as the basis for his admonition to be holy. Leviticus describes what holy conduct looks like from a biblical perspective. Holy conduct includes things like honoring your parents, caring for the poor, keeping the Sabbath, and not eating unclean meats, among other things.
3. Our calling to be holy means that our priorities and values will not match the world’s priorities and values. This will create some conflict with the world around us. Some people won’t like us and will even persecute us for our beliefs. Other people, however, will be drawn to God because of our witness.

In chapter 2, Peter continues to unpack what it means to live as an obedient child of God (1 Peter 1:14). Let’s read what he says:

1 Peter 2:1-3

So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander. Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation—if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.

In chapter 1, Peter wrote about how believers have been “born again” from God’s imperishable seed, the Word of God, which “[is the good news that was preached to \[them\]](#)” (1 Peter 1:25). Now that they have experienced this new birth, believers must “put away” all malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander. These vices are incompatible with a believer’s new identity in Messiah; they are incompatible with the calling of believers to “[love one another earnestly from a pure heart](#)” as it says in the verse chapter, verse 22 (1 Peter 1:22).

The scholar Paul Achtemeier provides an excellent summary of why Peter lists these particular vices:

κακία [malice] is surely a power that destroys community, and is identified as directly opposed to acts motivated from love in Rom 13:10. The next set of three vices—deception, hypocrisy, envy—are also inimical to a community based on mutual love, since deception and hypocrisy point to acts intended to serve the individual at the expense of the neighbor, and envy means to wish better for oneself than for the other [...]. In this context, the final vice (καταλαλιά, “evil speech”) probably refers to habitual disparagement of others rather than some kind of openly slanderous speech. Taken together, they represent the kind of attitudes and actions in whose presence true community based on love is impossible, and that are therefore absent among those who have heeded the command to love one another.

-Paul J. Achtemeier, *1 Peter* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), pp. 144-145

Since believers have been “born again” into God’s family, they must love their brothers and sisters, which means putting away those vices that are harmful to those around them.

He goes on to say, “[Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation](#)” (1 Peter 2:2). God is the source not only of believers’ birth but also their spiritual sustenance or “milk,” which enables us to grow spiritually. Believers should “long” for this spiritual sustenance from God—that is, we are to focus on becoming more godly, growing up as God’s children, instead of engaging in things like malice, deceit, and slander.

The image of milk goes along with Peter’s themes of birth and family. Just as an infant needs his mother’s milk in order to grow physically, believers need God’s milk in order to grow spiritually. The “pure spiritual milk” refers to God’s Word. It was God’s Word, the gospel preached to the community (1 Peter 1:25), which gave believers new birth (1 Peter 1:23). And it’s that same pure spiritual word that believers need so that they grow up into salvation.

As we’ve mentioned before, to Peter, salvation has happened “already but not yet.” While Peter can speak of believers being “saved” when they are immersed into Messiah’s death and resurrection by their faith—a spiritual reality symbolized by water baptism (1 Peter 3:21)—salvation is a lifelong process of growth that culminates into the final salvation to be experienced fully when the Messiah returns (1 Peter 1:5, 7, 9, 13; 4:18).

Elsewhere in Scripture, the image of milk is used for elementary doctrines for new believers (Hebrews 5:12-14), but that doesn’t seem to be the meaning of the image here since “milk” is presented as something all believers should long for. As Achtemeier writes:

The point here is not that the readers are to advance beyond the stage of being immature Christians; rather the point is that their desire for such milk is to be as constant and unrelenting as the infant’s desire for its milk.

-Paul J. Achtemeier, *1 Peter* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), p. 146

If you have genuinely received the Messiah by faith and have been born again into God's family—or as Peter puts it, “if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good” (1 Peter 2:3)—you should desire God's word. If you've experienced the Lord's goodness, you will want to experience more. Your longing for God's word should be like that of an infant's longing for his mother's milk. You might ask yourself, “Does Peter describe me here? Do I yearn for God's Word? Do I see God's Word as the source of my spiritual nourishment?” If we've truly been born again from God's imperishable seed, which Peter defines as God's word, then we will long to study and practice God's Word.

The importance of God's Word to our spiritual lives isn't emphasized enough in much of Christianity today. We need to get to the place where we *long* for the pure spiritual Word of God. Let's continue:

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, 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 [Yeshua Messiah]. 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.” 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,” and “A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense.” They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do. 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. 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.

Here, Peter establishes his readers' identity—they are a community of faith built upon the foundation of the Messiah. They are a holy priesthood commissioned to “proclaim the excellencies” of God, who delivered them from darkness. And yet, as Peter will go on to say later, they currently live as “sojourners and exiles” within the world (1 Peter 2:11-25). Peter uses imagery from the TANAKH—the Old Testament—to describe his readers, essentially identifying them with Israel, whom God calls a “kingdom of priests and a holy nation” and his “treasured possession” (Exodus 19:5-6).

Let's unpack this passage a bit more. Peter says, “As you come to him.” The believers' longing for spiritual sustenance will lead them to the Messiah, who is the source of spiritual fulfillment. What Peter says about the Messiah next is central to understanding Peter's message to his readers. He describes the Messiah as “a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious.” Just as the Messiah was rejected by men, believers are rejected by men. Just as the Messiah is chosen and precious, believers are chosen and precious (1 Peter 1:1, 15, 2:9). And just as the Messiah was vindicated through his resurrection from the dead, believers will be vindicated at the end of the age when they are resurrected to eternal life (1 Peter 1:3-9). But in the meantime, believers must share in the Messiah's sufferings (1 Peter 2:24; 4:13-16).

Peter goes on to say, “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 Yeshua Messiah.” Believers connected to the living stone likewise become living stones that God builds into a spiritual house, a living temple where God's Spirit dwells. This same Spirit “sanctifies” and “rests” upon believers (1 Peter 1:2; 4:14).

Paul uses this same imagery to describe the community of Jews and Gentiles united in Messiah:

Ephesians 2:19-22

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 [Messiah Yeshua] himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

We see the same thing in 1 Corinthians:

1 Corinthians 3:16-17

Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.

The word "you" in this passage is plural, referring to the entire community of believers. Once again, followers of Yeshua are described as a type of spiritual temple in which God's Spirit dwells.

This imagery of a living Temple was not unique to the early followers of Messiah. For instance, the Qumran community described themselves in these same terms: "a temple for Israel," "a perfect and true house in Israel," and so forth (1 QS 8.5-9; 4Q511; f35.2-3). Similarly, the Pharisees saw themselves as types of priests. They sought to extend the Temple protocols into their communities and homes. For instance, in Mark 7, we see that they appropriated the priestly hand washing rituals for their own community (Mark 7:3; cf. Exodus 30:17-21). They even treated their table as an extension of God's table in the Jerusalem Temple. This was why table fellowship was such a big deal in the first century—to the Pharisees, community meals were Temple meals.

It should be noted, by the way, that while this imagery and these ideas were common among the Judaisms of the Second Temple era, neither the Qumran community nor the Pharisees viewed themselves as replacing the Jerusalem Temple service or priesthood. As the scholar Oskar Skarsaune writes:

Since the days of the "wicked priest," the Essenes regarded the temple as polluted and the sacrifices as invalid. Nevertheless they continued to send votive offerings to the temple, and their rejection of the present temple service was by no means meant as a disparagement of the temple or a declaration that its service was insignificant. **To the contrary, they rejected the present polluted service precisely because they valued the temple so much.** In fact, they expected to take control of the temple and either cleanse it from pollution or rebuild it in the near future, when the great eschatological war had begun. The spiritual worship and the community meal at Qumran were only temporary substitutes for the temple service, which was to be resumed as soon as possible. In the meantime the Qumran community itself could be called the temple of God: He was in their midst.

-Oscar Skarsaune, *In the Shadow of the Temple: Jewish Influences on Early Christianity* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2002), pp. 114-115

Regarding the Pharisees, Skarsaune continues:

[T]he Pharisees sought to make every Israelite a priest and every meal a temple meal. Their aim was to extend the sanctity of the temple, not to replace it or make it unnecessary.

-Oscar Skarsaune, *In the Shadow of the Temple: Jewish Influences on Early Christianity* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2002), p. 121

In the same way, the earliest followers of Yeshua still appear to have participated in the Jerusalem temple services regularly. We read about this in the book of Acts for instance (Acts 2:46; 3:1; 21:26). The author of Hebrews himself, who goes to some length to demonstrate the superiority of Messiah's heavenly priesthood, he still acknowledges the continuing validity of the Levitical Priesthood on earth (Hebrews 8:4). So we shouldn't see Peter's use of the Temple and priesthood imagery for believers as an indication that he was teaching some sort of replacement theology, as many Christians have supposed. The New Testament authors were really no different from groups like the Pharisees and Qumran community, who taught similar ideas for their communities while still valuing the Jerusalem temple.

With that in mind, what does Peter mean when he says that followers of Yeshua “[offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Yeshua Messiah](#)”? Once again, the concept of “spiritual sacrifices” was common among the Judaisms of the day. For instance, the Wisdom of Sirach, written around 180 BC, speaks of obedience and giving to the poor as types of sacrifices:

Keeping the Law is worth many offerings; it is a fellowship offering in itself. Returning a kindness is like a grain offering; giving to the poor is like a thanksgiving offering. Keeping away from sin will please the Lord and make atonement for sin. But don't come to the Temple without an offering; the Law requires that you bring one.

-Sirach 35:1-5, GNT

Of course, the Old Testament itself speaks of contrition and prayer as types of sacrifices (Psalm 51:16-19; 141:2). Essentially, Peter admonishes his readers to love God and love each other by offering “spiritual sacrifices”—repenting of sin, praising God, doing good works, being kind, and meeting the needs of their neighbors (1 Peter 1:15-16; 2:24; 3:6, 10-13). These are the types of “sacrifices” that God finds acceptable.

For more on this, check out our teaching [Spiritual Sacrifices: What Should We Offer to God?](#)

Peter goes on to give biblical support for his claims about Yeshua. He quotes Isaiah 28:16 and identifies Yeshua as the “cornerstone,” which is the foundation of the house. Believers who have put their faith in Messiah will not be put to shame. Regardless of how the culture might shame them, God never will. As the scholar Duane Watson remarks:

The verb “put to shame” (*kataischynō*) is in the form of a passive subjunctive, which in the LXX refers to God's shaming opponents and the unfaithful (Ps. 118:31, 78, 116 [119:31, 78, 116]; Isa. 47:3; Jer. 23:40; Ezek. 16; 23). The quotation's double negative affirms that God will absolutely never shame those with faith in Christ. The recipients can be assured that however they are shamed by their neighbors for association with the rejected Stone (v. 7), they will not be shamed by God.

-Duane F. Watson & Terrance Callan, *First and Second Peter* (Grand Rapids, MI: BakerAcademic, 2012), p. 50

In contrast to the believers, the unbelievers stumble over the “stone”—that is, the Messiah. Here, Peter quotes Psalm 118. According to Peter, “[They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.](#)” The unbelievers’ disobedience refers specifically to their unwillingness to believe in the word, which Peter defined earlier as the good news preached to his readers (1 Peter 1:25).

It seems from this verse that the unbelievers were *destined* to disbelieve and disobey. In fact, some see this verse as evidence that God predestines certain people to this fate. Does God predestine people to unbelief and therefore eternal condemnation, or are people able to make their own choices whether or not to believe the message?

In his second epistle, Peter tells us that God doesn’t wish that *any* should perish but that *all* should reach repentance (2 Peter 3:9). This echoes God’s heart expressed through the prophet Ezekiel, where God literally *pleads* with the wicked to repent (Ezekiel 33:10-20).

Ezekiel 33:11

[Say to them, As I live, declares the Lord GOD \[YHWH\], I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel?](#)

Additionally, while speaking to the pagan philosophers in Athens, Paul said that God “[commands all people everywhere to repent](#)” (Acts 17:30). But if God predestines some to disbelieve the message, then this demand is impossible for them to comply with. They simply *can’t*. How can God, who is perfectly just, command something that he makes impossible for some people to obey and then judge them for it?

When we look at Scripture as a whole, it appears that God desires people to repent, and he is grieved when they don’t. It appears that people have a choice to repent or not, and they will be forgiven or judged based on the choice *they* make. If God predestines certain people to believe or be a certain way, it seems strange that he would be grieved over what they believe and do. It seems odd that he would express a desire for people to live obediently if it’s actually his will that they disobey.

So then, how might we understand this verse in 1 Peter, which appears to say that some were “destined” to disobey? Well, we might start by asking, is that really what it says?

Other translations indicate that God did not determine man’s unbelief but rather *the punishment* for his unbelief. For example, see how the 1995 NASB renders this verse:

1 Peter 2:8, NASB (1995)

[...for they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this doom they were also appointed.](#)

If we go with this translation, Peter does not say that God has predestined some people to disobey the word. He says this: believers and unbelievers will respond to the Messiah, the “stone,” differently. Believers will regard Yeshua as the precious cornerstone (1 Peter 2:6-7a). For this, believers will be honored. Unbelievers, on the other hand, will regard Yeshua as a “rock of offense” and will stumble over him (1 Peter 2:7b-8). Their stumbling will lead to condemnation. God has chosen honor and salvation for the believer and punishment for the unbeliever. By stumbling over the stone—rejecting the word—unbelievers have set their fate for eternity. Again, it is not the unbelief that is predestined but the punishment for the unbelief. This interpretation of the verse seems to make more sense and is in harmony with other passages.

(For a technical analysis of the Greek source text, see Armin J. Panning, “What Has Been Determined (ἐτέθησαν) in 1 Peter 2:8?” *WLQ* 98 [2001]: 48–52.)

Moving on, Peter now speaks again about his readers’ identity in the Messiah. Alluding to passages in the Old Testament about Israel, Peter calls his readers “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession.” Like Israel was always intended to do, Peter urges his readers to proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” The contrast between light and darkness was a common motif in the Old Testament, where darkness represented separation from God and light represented God’s presence (Proverbs 2:13; Psalm 43:3; Isaiah 2:5; 9:2).

Peter applies these titles and Old Testament descriptions of Israel to his predominantly Gentile audience on purpose. He wants to identify them with Israel. Through Messiah, they have become full members of God’s family. Therefore, they have the same mission to proclaim God’s excellencies.

The next quotation Peter applies to his readers is interesting. He says, “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.”

Here, Peter cites Hosea 1:10 and 2:23, which are a reversal of God’s judgment against the northern kingdom of Israel. God tells Hosea to name his second and third children “not my people” and “no mercy,” symbolizing Israel’s estrangement from God (Hosea 1:6-9). God exiled the northern kingdom of Israel, and they were scattered among the nations. But unlike the southern kingdom of Judah who was exiled to Babylon, the northern kingdom never returned.

The context of Hosea’s prophecies that Peter quotes is God’s promise to restore the kingdom of Israel at the end of the age. One day, the faithful remnants from the northern and southern kingdoms will be reunited. Like Paul (Romans 9:24-26), Peter applies these prophecies to his *Gentile* readers—those who have become part of God’s people through faith in the Messiah! Peter sees these faithful Gentiles coming to the Lord as the fulfillment of Hosea’s prophecies concerning the restoration of Israel!

How does that work? Well, when the northern kingdom of Israel was exiled, they became “not my people.” Gentiles, those of the other nations, are also “not my people” by definition. So, when the northern kingdom of Israel was scattered among the nations, they became indistinguishable from the Gentiles—there was no longer any separation between the northern kingdom that Hosea addresses and the other nations that the northern kingdom became part of. Why is this significant? Because, in Peter’s mind, when he sees these Gentiles—those who are “not my people”—coming to faith in the Messiah, he sees it as the promise of Israel’s restoration coming to fruition. Since the northern kingdom of Israel became indistinguishable from the nations, then the only way for God to restore Israel is to bring in the rest of the nations!

To be clear, Peter probably doesn’t think that all these Gentiles coming to faith in Messiah are physical descendants of the ancient Israelites. He and Paul are simply making the connection between Israel becoming “not my people” and these Gentiles, who are also “not my people,” coming to faith in the Messiah. Since Israel became “not my people,” the only way to restore them is to welcome in *all* of the “not my people.” In other words, since Israel was scattered among the Gentiles and became Gentiles themselves, God’s promise to someday restore Israel opened the door for *all* Gentiles to be included in that restoration. As the scholar Jason Staples remarks:

God has provided for the salvation of the Gentiles by scattering Ephraim among the nations only to be restored. In saving Ephraim, God saves the nations; in saving the nations, God saves

Ephraim. Thus, the new covenant not only restores Israel but also—in the unforeseen plan of God—fulfills the promises to Abraham that all the nations would be blessed, not “through” his seed (i.e., as outsiders) but by inclusion and incorporation *in his seed* (Gal 3:8).

-Jason A. Staples, “What Do the Gentiles have to Do with ‘All Israel’? A Fresh Look at Romans 11:25-27,” *JBL* 130, no. 2 (2011): 371-390

If Peter’s predominantly Gentile audience still had any doubt about who they were in the Messiah, Peter’s description would have been more than enough to reassure them. All who put their faith in the Messiah, regardless of their ethnicity or cultural background, are part of God’s people, Israel.

A Desire for God

Let’s look again at Peter’s characterization of believers at the beginning of chapter 2. According to Peter, genuine believers “[long for the pure spiritual milk](#).” They have tasted and seen that the Lord is good, so they want more of him! Devoting our lives to God is how we overcome the destructive vices of our former life—the malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander that consume our hearts as Peter talked about earlier. We put away those vices only by continuously pursuing the Lord, immersing ourselves in his Word, and growing in our relationship with him. Righteous behavior flows from a relationship with God. We should all desire that deep, meaningful relationship with him.

As the Psalmist proclaims:

Psalm 42:1-2

[As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God?](#)

Does this psalm reflect your desire for him? Do you have that ache in your heart just to catch a glimpse of his glory, to experience his presence in your life? Do you thirst for him?

Too many professing believers treat God as an accessory that they’ve added to their lives. There is no real relationship. Their faith isn’t that important to them. They profess belief in God, but their lives don’t reflect that belief. That’s not the type of “relationship” that God wants.

If you find yourself feeling disconnected from God, but you want to change and have a deeper and more meaningful relationship with him, then you need to put in some work! Don’t wait for it to just happen to you because it probably won’t. Like any relationship, cultivating a deep connection with God requires effort.

Just as you might plan dates with your spouse, plan to spend some time with God. Prioritize the relationship. To start out, consider dedicating just one hour every day to prayer, reading Scripture, or singing to God.

If you struggle with laziness or forgetfulness, put together an accountability plan to encourage and remind yourself to work toward cultivating that spiritual intimacy with him. You could set alarms on your phone to remind yourself to set aside some time to spend with God. You could have your spouse or close friend hold you accountable, giving them permission to ask about your progress to make sure you are following through with your plan. You can keep a journal, or write down your prayers and thoughts about the Scriptures.

As James writes, “draw near to God, and he will draw near to you” (James 4:8). As you take that step toward God, he will meet you at that step. “Long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation.”

We pray you have been blessed by this teaching. Remember, continue to test everything. Shalom!

For more on this and other teachings, please visit us at www.testeverything.net

Shalom, and may Yahweh bless you in walking in the whole Word of God.

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