

The Believer's Privileges, Part 1: Union

Scripture: 1 Peter 2:4–5a

Code: 60-17

INTRODUCTION

Peter did not write like Paul. Paul's writing is step by step and is generally easily outlined. Peter's writing is more cyclical. He would make a point, go on to another point, and then amplify his first point.

In 1 Peter 2:4-10, Peter weaves his way in and out of some very wonderful truths. In the midst of new revelation he gives us, he repeatedly quotes or alludes to the Old Testament. Peter's knowledge of the Old Testament was apparently so extensive that it came out in his writing almost inadvertently.

A. The Theme

1. The joy of Christian privileges

The theme of 1 Peter 2:4-10 is spiritual privileges. When we study the Bible we're often studying spiritual duties, being exhorted, or being commanded. But in this passage of Scripture we are not commanded or exhorted. Instead Peter gives us a list explaining what is ours because we are Christ's. This is a passage of great joy for every Christian.

2. The meaning of Christian privileges

I associate the word privilege with my childhood. One of the ways my parents encouraged me to obey was warning that my disobedience would result in loss of privileges. A privilege is a right or benefit enjoyed by a person beyond the advantage of most. So the privileged belong to a class that enjoys special favor. That's certainly true of Christians because we enjoy the special favor of spiritual privileges in Christ.

3. An illustration of Christian privileges

Perhaps the best way to understand the privileges mentioned in verses 4-10 is to look at these verses as if you were gazing into a kaleidoscope. One that I looked at recently had colored rocks in the end of it, and as I held it up toward the light and turned the end all kinds of different forms and shapes appeared. But it was always the same rocks, just arranged, magnified, and displayed in different ways. That is a picture of our passage. In 1 Peter 2:4-10, Peter keeps turning the kaleidoscope of Christian privilege. Every time he turns it you see the same truths arranged in a panoply of new beauty.

B. The Text

First Peter 2:4-5 says to come "to Him [Christ] as to a living stone, rejected by men, but choice and precious in the sight of God, you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house."

LESSON

I. THE CORNERSTONE OF OUR PRIVILEGES (v. 4)

A. The Recipients of the Privileges (v. 4a)

"Coming to Him."

1. They have an established relationship

It is our coming to Christ that initiates all our spiritual privileges. We often say as Christians that "we came to Christ," which as we see is biblical. Jesus calls all men and women to come to Him.a)

Matthew 11:28--"Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest."b) John

6:35--"I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me shall not hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst."c) John 6:37--"All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me."d) John 6:44--"No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws him."e) John 6:65--"No one can come to Me, unless it has been granted him from the Father."f) John 7:37--"If any man is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink."Peter had heard Jesus say all those things since he was one of the disciples present when Jesus taught. He knew from experience that the believer's privileges begin with coming to Christ. At the moment of salvation we enter not only the realm of spiritual duty, but also the realm of spiritual privilege. Paul affirmed that truth when he said, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ" (Eph. 1:3).

2. They have an enduring relationship

That we came to Christ does not convey Peter's total meaning in this verse. His use of the Greek word *proserchomai* carries the idea of not only coming, but also of remaining. The same concept is found in the apostle John's writings, which link coming to Christ with abiding in Christ (John 15:4-5, 7, 9-10; 1 John 3:24). Peter wanted us to understand that when we come to Christ, a permanent relationship of intimate personal communion is established. *Proserchomai* in the Greek translation of the Old Testament was used to speak of drawing near to God for continuing worship. In the book of Hebrews it speaks of the same (Heb. 10:1, 22). *Proselutos* (from which we get the word proselyte), the Greek noun related to *proserchomai*, refers to a person who was far off but who drew near. In the Bible it speaks of Gentiles--those who were outside God's covenant with Israel and therefore living outside the law and promises God gave to Israel--who had drawn near and identified with Israel. The proselyte was one who consciously drew near to God's people and remained. Peter's use of words is descriptive of the inner movement toward communion with Jesus Christ. That is where our spiritual privileges begin.

B. The Giver of the Privileges (v. 4b)

"To a living stone, rejected by men, but choice and precious in the sight of God."

1. His identity

Peter used the analogy of a stone to identify and describe Christ. This first mention of Christ as a stone is the start of an amazing combination of images from three different Old Testament texts that refer to the Messiah as a stone (Isa. 28:16; Ps. 118:22; and Isa. 8:14). Peter used those references to show that spiritual privilege is based on an abiding relationship to Christ. The Greek word translated stone (*lithos*, the common word for stone) sometimes spoke of a carved precious stone, but mostly of a stone used in constructing a building--one that was chiseled, hammered, and sawn so that it might fit perfectly. In ancient times buildings were made of stones so heavy and so perfectly fit together, they simply stacked upon each other and were practically immovable.

2. His characterizations

a) The living stone Peter described that perfectly shaped stone as a "living stone." Now that's a paradoxical statement since we think of a stone as non-living. We sometimes refer to something as "stone dead." But the stone Peter referred to is a living stone. It has all the solidarity of stone, yet is alive. Jesus Christ is the perfect stone who is the cornerstone of the church (1 Pet. 2:6). Paul uses similar imagery in 1 Corinthians 10:4, where he says that Christ was the spiritual rock in the wilderness from whom Israel drank (Ex. 17:1-6). It was especially appropriate for Peter to speak of Christ as One who lives because He rose from the dead. (1) Romans 6:9--"Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him." (2) 1 Corinthians 15:45--"The last Adam [Christ] became a life-giving spirit." Not only is Christ alive, but He also gives life to His people. (3) 1 Peter 1:3--Through Christ, Christians are "born again to a living hope." (4) 1 Peter 1:23--We are "born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and abiding word of God." Peter did not say that Christ is "the" stone. He did not use the definite article before the word *lithos*, so the sense of the phrase is, "coming to Him as to living stone." It is

not that Christ is one among many stones, but that He is stone that possesses life. Anyone who receives Christ by faith is made alive by the life that is in Him. Eternal life is in Christ (1 John 5:11).b) The foundation stonePeter used the analogy of a stone to illustrate that Christ is the foundation of the building that is the church. Peter will expand on that theme by using Old Testament passages that present Christ in the same way.c) The rejected stoneStrange as it may seem, the living stone was a rejected stone. That is why so many in this world have no spiritual privileges. They do not enjoy the advantages, favor, and blessings we have because they have rejected the living stone. When the world rejects the foundation stone of God's church, they reject the only One who can give them life. Peter would have been thinking of the Jewish nation--the Sanhedrin, the leaders, the priests, and the people who followed them--who had rejected Jesus Christ, spat upon Him, beat Him, and finally crucified Him. All who have rejected Him since fit into that same category.Christ: The Perfect CornerstoneAccording to the building practices of Peter's time, when men set out to build a building they wanted stones that fit perfectly. The most important stone in the entire building was the cornerstone. The perfection of the cornerstone helped maintain the perfect symmetry of the rest of the building. Like a plumb line stretching in every direction, the cornerstone set the direction lines for the building both horizontally and vertically. If any of the angles were off, the building would be off. If the horizontal angle was not a perfect right angle, the building would be skewed. If the vertical angle was not correct, the building could collapse outward or inward. All those angles were set by one massive cornerstone to which all other stones were laid out in agreement. That is a wonderful picture of how Christ relates to the church.The leaders of Israel had wanted to participate in the building of God's glorious spiritual Temple. In looking for the Messiah, whom they thought would be the cornerstone of their building, Jesus was presented to them and they examined Him. They measured Christ according to their wisdom and concluded that He was not adequate so they rejected Him. He did not live up to their calculations. But their calculations were erroneous.The word Peter uses for rejection embodies the above process because it speaks of rejecting after examination or testing. It was unthinkable to the Jewish leadership that Jesus could possibly be the cornerstone of God's kingdom--a poor humble man who scathed them with His denunciations of their religious system. So He was sent to die on a cross. He wouldn't overthrow the Romans and establish Israel's freedom, so they rejected Him.d) The chosen stone(1) He is preciousYet even though rejected by men, Jesus was choice and precious in the sight of God. Peter's phrasing draws a contrast: Christ was rejected in the sight of men, but "was elect and precious in the sight of God" (1 Pet. 2:4). God measured Christ by the measuring instruments of His own perfection, and as a result could say, "Thou art My beloved Son, in Thee I am well pleased" (Mark 1:11). Christ was choice (ordained by God) and precious (Gk., entimon, "costly," "highly prized," or "rare").(2) He is perfectIn God's estimation, Jesus Christ is the perfect cornerstone, with every angle correct. Because He was perfect, Christ was raised from the dead and made the living cornerstone of the Church.By Whose Standard Do You Judge Greatness?I remember reading about two men who walked in the Louvre Museum in Paris. One of the curators of the museum, a man of great appreciation for art, observed two men staring at a great masterpiece. One turned to the other and said, "I don't think much of that painting." The curator, feeling obliged to reply to that man's statement, said to him, "Dear sir, if I may interrupt, that painting is not on trial; you are. The quality of that painting has already been assessed and approved, and you only demonstrate the frailty of your measuring capability by your judgment." Christ has been approved by God--it is man who is on trial.e) The stone of stumblingThe living stone is perfect and has been approved by God. Every man who measures it is on trial to see if his system of measuring is adequate. The Jewish people of Peter's day failed to measure correctly as a whole, and men and women today continue to reject the One whom God has declared to be choice and precious.(1) Psalm 2:12--"Kiss the Son, lest he [God] be angry and you be destroyed in your way" (NIV).(2) 1 Corinthians 16:22--"If anyone does not love the Lord [Jesus Christ], let him be accursed."(3) Acts 2:23--At Pentecost Peter said to his Jewish audience, "You nailed [Christ] to a

cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death. And God raised Him up again." Peter must have loved the subject of Christ's acceptance by the Father because he was constantly referring to it.(4) Acts 2:32-33--"This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses. ... [And He has] been exalted to the right hand of God."(5) Acts 4:11-12--"The stone which was rejected by you, the builders, ... became the very corner stone. And there is salvation in no one else."(6) Acts 5:30--"The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you [the Jewish leadership] had put to death by hanging Him on a cross. He is the one whom God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior."(7) Acts 10:39--"We are witnesses of all the things He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem. And they also put Him to death by hanging Him on a cross. God raised Him up on the third day, and granted that He should become visible." Although the Jewish people rejected Christ, God affirmed Him. Men disapproved of Christ at the onset, and have continued to do so down to our own time. When offered the choice between the sinless Son of God and the murderer Barabbas, the mob chose to crucify Christ and receive Barabbas. There's no better indicator of man's corrupt standards than that. Men still think they can adequately measure Jesus Christ, but their standards are just as corrupt. The world despises what God has chosen and hates what God loves most. Therefore the acclaim of the world is worthless--it couldn't recognize the value of the most precious person who ever lived.

II. THE KALEIDOSCOPE OF OUR PRIVILEGES (v. 5-10)

A. Union (v. 5a)

"You also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house."

It is from the living stone that we receive our spiritual privileges. Our first look into the kaleidoscope of spiritual privilege shows us the privilege of union with our Lord. We are said to be "living stones."

1. We become pictures of Christ

Christians not only come to the living stone, but also become living stones themselves. He who comes to Christ becomes like Christ. That is why we are called Christians. We are miniatures of Christ--little Christs. It is our privilege to live in accordance with that honorable title. And just as Christ is a living stone, we are being built up as living stones. We have eternal life.

2. We become partakers of Christ

The very life that exists in Christ exists in us. We not only pray to, worship, obey, and honor Him but are united with Him as well. Christ is the cornerstone and we are stones who are being built up as a spiritual house. We are part of the same building and possess the same life--it flows from Him to us. That's why Peter said, "He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, in order that by them you might become partakers of the divine nature" (2 Pet. 1:4). Christianity is the only religion in which its object becomes the life of the believer. A Buddhist is not said to be in Buddha. A Confucian is not in Confucius, or a Moslem in Mohammed. No Buddhist, Confucian, or Moslem ever taught that they possessed the eternal life of their founder, yet Christians have the life of Christ. We are partakers of the divine nature.a) Colossians 3:3--Paul said to the Colossian church, "You have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God."b) Colossians 3:4--Christ "is our life."c) Galatians 2:20--Paul said, "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me." That is a distinct spiritual privilege. While Christ is our savior, redeemer, and our God, it is equally true that we share His life. We participate in His eternal nature, obtain the strength of our living stone, possess the same resurrection life, and are built into the same great edifice of which Christ is the cornerstone.

3. We are placed in Christ

Peter said that as living stones, we "are being built up as a spiritual house" (v. 5). God is building that house on the cornerstone of Christ.a) Ephesians 2:19-22--"You are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together is growing into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are

being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit." Christ Himself is the cornerstone of the church and the rest of the foundation is the apostles and prophets. Paul was not speaking of personalities, but of the doctrine of the apostles and prophets--the Holy Scriptures.b) Acts 2:42--Those of the early church "were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching." The foundation of the church is the doctrine that came through the apostles, and Acts 2 affirms that the early church studied it. The church is not founded on the personalities or ministry of the apostles, but on the revealed Word of God that the apostles taught. Christ is the cornerstone and the rest of the foundation is apostolic doctrine. We as believers are part of the spiritual house being progressively built on that foundation.c) 1 Corinthians 3:9--The church is "God's building." A New House for GodPeter uses very strong and vivid language in his description of the church, especially in light of his upbringing. In the Jewish culture of his time, Judaism centered around the Temple in Jerusalem--the earthly, material, temporal house of God. But Peter declared that in the New Covenant God dwells in a spiritual house--not an earthly, material, temporal one.d) Acts 7:48--"The Most High does not dwell in houses made by human hands."e) Acts 17:24--"The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands." God dwells in a spiritual house made up of Christians, who are the stones that make up that house.f) 1 Timothy 3:15--The household of God "is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth." God dwells in the hearts of His redeemed people.g) Hebrews 3:6--"Christ was faithful as a Son over His [God's] house whose house we are."Peter presented Christ as the living stone on which the doctrine of the apostles is laid out as a foundation for the church. In perfect symmetry God builds the house of His people on that foundation--not on the dead stones of the old Temple, but on living people united with Christ.Peter may have used that picture of God's people because of the circumstances of the people he wrote to. It is an appropriate picture since we are the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19) , who dwells in us both individually and collectively (Eph. 2:22).ConclusionThe first great spiritual privilege of the believer is union with Christ. That's why we can "do exceedingly abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us" (Eph. 3:20). We possess spiritual power, having every spiritual resource for every need. That's why Paul said he would not presume to speak of anything except what Christ had accomplished through him (Rom. 16:18).Because Christ takes up residence in the lives of those who belong to Him, Paul could say that all his spiritual service was "according to His power, which mightily works within me" (Col. 1:29). If you are a Christian, all the good you do is through the resident power within you because of your union with Christ. Christ lives through you, loves through you, speaks through you, serves through you--even worships God through you. The life of Christ in you preserves, controls, conforms, and supplies you. As a Christian, you can truly say, "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me" (Gal. 2:20).

Focusing on the Facts

1. What is the theme of 1 Peter 2:4-10?
2. What is meant by the word privilege?
3. What initiates the rights of spiritual privilege (1 Pet. 2:4)?
4. The Greek word *proserchomai* not only contains the idea of coming to Christ, but also the idea of _____.
5. What Old Testament texts describe Christ as a stone? Why did Peter use that description of Christ?
6. What other New Testament writer described Christ as a stone? Where?
7. Why can it be said of Christ that He is a living stone?
8. What is the result of rejecting the living stone?
9. How is the picture of Christ as a stone a picture of Christ's relationship to the church?
10. What does the world's rejection of Christ imply about the value of worldly acclaim?
11. Christians not only come to the living stone, but also become _____

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12. What is unique about Christianity in comparison to the world's religions?
 13. What is different about the Temples of the New and Old Covenants?
 14. What do believers possess by virtue of their union with Christ?

Pondering the Principles

1. The church of our day tends to rely on self-generated programs life generated from Christ to us. Though the Christian life is to be a continual coming to Christ for renewal and refreshment, we too often turn to broken cisterns that contain no water. In commenting on our text of 1 Peter 2:4-5 over a hundred years ago, the British pastor Charles Hadden Spurgeon exhorted his people to avoid the same error: "God grant us the grace to realize as a church that we are the temple of God, and realize it best by coming daily to Christ more and more closely, that we may be vitally one with Him" (The Treasury of the Bible, vol. 4 [London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1963], p. 380). Examine how you spend your time. Is your life characterized by a continual coming to and abiding in Christ? Is it time for you to reorganize your hours so that you can drink long and deep from God's Word and enjoy His companionship in prayer?
2. A house is generally an accurate reflection of the characteristics and tastes of its owner. That is even more true if the owner designed and built the house himself--sparing no expense in the process. And that is no less true of God's dwelling-place. The Puritan Thomas Watson put it well when he said, "Christ never admired anything but the beauty of holiness: he slighted the glorious buildings of the temple, but admired the woman's faith.... The Lord has two heavens to dwell in, and the holy heart is one of them" (A Body of Divinity [Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1978 reprint], p. 248). Christians are to furnish themselves in such a way that they reflect their owner's tastes. Whose tastes do you reflect?

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