

Lesson 10 | Renewal of Our Witness

Bible Text:

1 Peter 2:1-10

¹*So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander..* ²*Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation –* ³*if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.*

⁴*As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious,* ⁵*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.* 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.”

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,”

⁸*and*

“A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense.”

They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.

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.*

Commentary

A People With A Motive

There are many imperatives in the Bible. They are given to us by the Lord to prescribe how we are to live a life that pleases him. This text begins with an imperative that contains both a prohibition (what not to do) and an admonition (what to do). In verse 1 we are commanded to *put away* various sins, and in verse 2 we are exhorted to *long* (for the pure spiritual milk) and *grow* (up into salvation) (parentheses mine). Notice carefully, however, that when providing the imperative the Lord also provides us with a motive to obey that imperative—*if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good* (v. 3). The assumption here is that the believer in Jesus has had his/her soul’s appetite richly satisfied and that we have enjoyed (and are enjoying) an experiential and joyful knowledge of Jesus (see Isaiah 55:1-2).

Naked imperatives would be expressions of the law (don’t do this, do that). There is no power in the law to motivate us to do anything. The power comes from the gospel, and in verses 1-3 we see a beautiful relationship between the law of duty and the gospel of grace.

We are a people who live in the power of a gospel-motive. In Christ, we have *tasted that the Lord is good*. Therefore, we live a life of joyful obedience to the One who has satisfied our soul’s hunger (John 6:35) and quenched our soul’s thirst (John 7:38).



A People With an Identity

Peter is very quick to remind us of who we are and who we are not. The resume of our identity in Christ is most impressive—and humbling.

First, we are called *living stones* (v. 5). Note that the context of this statement is, amazingly, that we are given the same title as belongs to Jesus! In the preceding verse (4) he is called *a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious*. What an amazing affirmation of our eternal significance! We bear the same name as he does, which by necessity also makes us *chosen and precious* in God's sight.

Second, we are called *a spiritual house* (v. 5). Notice that in a narcissistic culture such as ours, our carnal and cultural tendency is to think individualistically and autonomously. But the Lord calls us into community. The metaphor would not be lost on the first century believer, as houses were often made of stones piled one upon another. We cannot be the people God has called us to be in isolation. We have a corporate identity.

Third, we are called *a chosen race* (v. 9), which draws from the Lord's description of his ancient people, Israel, in Deuteronomy 7:6-8. God's choosing of us is purely a matter of his kind and sovereign grace (see Romans 9).

Fourth, we are called *a royal priesthood* (v. 9; see also Exodus 19:6). As priests we have the privilege of direct access to God as well as the privilege of offering holy sacrifices to him.

Fifth, we are called *a holy nation* (v. 9; see also Exodus 19:6). The adjective, *holy*, refers not simply to moral character but to a visible distinction. We are a people set apart to live in a way that is distinct from the world (I John 3:15-16).

Sixth, we are called *a people for his own possession* (v. 9; see also Exodus 19:5). The Greek word translated possession means to have been bought with a price. Peter also states that we were *ransomed . . . not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of*

Christ . . . (I Peter 1:18-19).

Seventh, we are a people who have been *called . . . out of darkness into his marvelous light* (see also Colossians 1:13-14).

Recall from RENEWAL Lesson 3, "Are You Believing the Gospel?," that we only have four options in life in terms of who or what defines us: we define ourselves, we let others define us, we let the devil define us, or we yield to how God defines us. What an amazing, seven-fold description of who you are! Are you believing this good news of your gospel-identity? Can you imagine seven greater definitions of the Christian and the Christian church? This is your (and our) identity! Believe it, rejoice in it, thank God for it, and live in the truth of it.

A People With a Purpose

One of the great scenes in the movie "Chariots of Fire" is when Olympic runner and Christian missionary Eric Liddell is walking with his sister, Jennie, in the hills of Scotland. She expresses grief that he has lessened his focus on the Lord's ministry and is being too consumed with his running in preparation for the 1924 Olympic games in Paris. His oft-quoted response is profound:

★ "Jennie, Jennie, I believe God made me for a purpose. He made me for China. But he also made me fast—and when I run, I feel his pleasure."

The greatest feeling of pleasure in life is to know and follow the pleasure of the One who has given us life. We are a people with a divinely appointed purpose in addition to a divinely defined identity. This text highlights two of those purposes.

First, as a *royal priesthood* (our identity), we are called *to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ* (v. 5). In essence, we are called to a life of worship. This is what priests did and this is what we do. Paul expresses it similarly when he states:

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship (Romans 12:1).

Our highest call is to be worshippers of God.

Second, this text calls us to be ambassadors of God, *that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light* (1 Peter 2:9). The metaphor of ambassador, also used by Paul, is quite powerful. Ambassadors are sent by a king or governing authority as a representative. They live in a foreign country but never forget their loyalty to their king. They learn the culture of this foreign land in order to communicate effectively in it. When the king desires to send a message to this foreign country, he does so by way of the ambassador. When the ambassador speaks, he is speaking on behalf of his king.

And so it is with us. We are sent by King Jesus to other people, domestic and foreign, for the express purpose of *proclaim[ing] the excellencies of him who called . . . [us] out of darkness into his marvelous light* (v. 9). What an amazingly awesome and wonderful privilege we have to represent our Lord to those who do not know him!

We serve the King of kings and the Commander of the armies of heaven! What a privilege to announce to the world his powerful and heroic deeds to save people from sin and to renew all things for his glory!

What are we to *proclaim* to our world about the King whom we represent? We are called to announce, with our lips and our lives, the *excellencies* of Christ. This word (*aretas*) suggests someone's ability to perform powerful, heroic deeds, or some great intrinsic royal

attribute. It was used of both political and military heroes. We serve the King of kings and the Commander of the armies of heaven! What a privilege to announce to the world his powerful and heroic deeds to save people from sin and to renew all things for his glory! Indeed, we are a people with a purpose—to proclaim Christ to the entire world.

A People With Sins That Must Be Named

Sadly and shamefully, we are a people who have not served our purpose well. A common statistic that has been cited by such reputable sources such as the Fuller Institute for Church Growth and evangelical church analyst George Barna suggests that over 90% of all American Christians have never personally shared their faith with a non-Christian for the purpose of seeing that person come to saving faith in Christ. How can this be?

One explanation for this absence of personal evangelism is that Christians have not been properly trained in personal evangelism. There is some measure of truth in this, but it is not the real reason. If you are a happily married person, how hard is it to share the *excellencies* of your spouse with a friend? If you are a proud parent or grandparent, how difficult is it for you to share the *excellencies* of your children or grandchildren? If you love a particular sport or hobby, how challenging is it to share the *excellencies* of that passion with another?

Let's be honest and admit it. Training in personal evangelism would be very helpful but begs the larger question: Why don't we seek the salvation of the lost in light of the clear mandate of Scripture?

First, we simply do not love lost people. Their plight, their lostness, their eternal damnation simply does not move us sufficiently to share Jesus with them. We are inherently selfish and think first and foremost of ourselves rather than others. When Jesus saw the unbelief of Jerusalem, he cried out a painful lament over it (Luke 13:34). When is the last time you (or we) deeply grieved over anyone not knowing Christ?

One of the most powerful movie scenes in this regard is from “Titanic.” As that famous ship slipped beneath the ocean surface and left the dead bodies of hundreds in its wake, a lifeboat filled with fellow passengers looked for survivors. One such survivor called out, “Is there anyone alive?” Certainly most Christians would not hesitate for a moment to look for and rescue a drowning person. Tragically, most Christians cannot or do not want to hear the voices of those who are drowning in the sea of their own sin. How can our hearts be so callous and cold?

Second, we fear other people, especially if they are different from us. We are more committed to maintaining our own emotional comfort than we are to engaging others about their eternal spiritual condition. To speak to someone about Christ, especially if they are different from ourselves racially, culturally, educationally, or socially, requires something from us that we are simply not willing to give. It requires that we enter into their lives by giving up ours. It means that we value their eternal state more than our emotional state. It means staying in the boat and not taking a risk rather than obeying Christ and attempting to walk on water.

Scripture teaches that *The fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is safe* (Proverbs 29:25). Do we walk in fear of what others might think, say, or do if we tell them about Jesus? Do we believe that we are truly safe in the Lord and, therefore, witness with a humble and holy boldness? Are we afraid of how others might define us rather than believing how Christ has defined us?

A People With Two Opportunities

The book of I Peter was written to believers who were suffering persecution for their faith. One might think that the strategy given to them from the Lord through Peter would be to “lie low” until the storm of persecution passes over. But there is a clear and compelling two-fold call God places upon them (and us) to stand tall rather than lying low.

The first we might call “proactive evangelism”:

Do we walk in fear of what others might think, say, or do if we tell them about Jesus? Do we believe that we are truly safe in the Lord and, therefore, witness with a humble and holy boldness?

that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light (I Peter 2:9). There is much talk today about “earning the right” to share Christ with a friend. The false assumption is that we have no legitimate claim to evangelizing a “stranger” unless and until we establish a friendship that allows us to do so. We find no such language or notion in the New Testament. Certainly the command to love our neighbor suggests that we do indeed serve them by building a rapport with them, but to hold hostage the call to proactive evangelism until this friendship is established is simply unbiblical.

The second method of evangelism we might call “responsive evangelism.” This is the assumption of our I Peter text. Our lives are to radiate the love of Christ and reflect the hope that we have in Christ, which, in turn, intrigues the unbeliever in such a way that that person makes inquiry about the hope that is in us. We then share Christ with both gentleness and respect.

Both opportunities abound if we petition the Lord to provide them and look for such opportunities with the eyes of faith, not fear. The call to evangelize is both clear and compelling. May the Lord forgive us for our selfishness and fear and, by a strong movement of his Holy Spirit, grant us humble and holy boldness to be ambassadors of our great Savior and King.

Questions

1. What does this text teach us about our “gospel motive”?
2. What does this text teach us about our “gospel identity”?
3. Of the seven identity statements in this text, which one is most meaningful to you, and why?
4. What does it mean to be an “ambassador” for Christ? Prior to this lesson, have you perceived yourself in this way?
5. When is the last time you repented of the two sins described in this lesson?
6. Will you begin to pray daily—INTERCEDE—for someone you know who does not evidence a saving faith in Christ? Will you pray for greater love to INVEST in this friendship in a more consistent and intentional way? Will you pray for courage to INVITE them to Central Presbyterian Church where they might hear the gospel?

NOTE: If every member of Central would INTERCEDE, INVEST, and INVITE just one person in this way, what might be the impact of such an effort? Imagine the spiritual fruit that might result! May it be so!

Suggested Prayer

(from The Valley of Vision—A Collection of Puritan Prayers & Devotions, ed. Arthur Bennett, The Banner of Truth Trust, 1975, p. 115)

Divine Support

THOU ART THE BLESSED GOD,
happy in thyself,
source of happiness in thy creatures,
my maker, benefactor, proprietor, upholder.

Thou hast produced and sustained me,
supported and indulged me,
saved and kept me;

Thou art in every situation able to meet my
needs and miseries.

May I live by thee,
live for thee,
never be satisfied with my Christian progress
but as I resemble Christ;

And may conformity to his principles, temper,
and conduct
grow hourly in my life.

Let thy unexampled love constrain me into holy
obedience
and render my duty my delight.

If others deem my faith folly,
my meekness infirmity,
my zeal madness,
my hope delusion,
my actions hypocrisy,
may I rejoice to suffer for thy name.

Keep me walking steadfastly towards the country
of everlasting delights,
that paradise-land which is my true
inheritance.

Support me by the strength of heaven
that I may never turn back,
or desire false pleasures
that wilt and disappear into nothing.

As I pursue my heavenly journey by thy grace
let me be known as a man with no aim
but that of a burning desire for thee,
and the good and salvation of my fellow men.