

# Session 1

## THE CHURCH: BETTER TOGETHER

*1 Peter 2:1-10*

### Memory Verse

*Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all slander.<sup>2</sup> Like newborn infants, desire the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow up into your salvation,<sup>3</sup> if you have tasted that the Lord is good.*

– 1 PETER 2:1-3, CSB



## The Church: Better Together

**THEOLOGICAL THEME:** Peter called the believers to whom he was writing a “holy priesthood” and then a “royal priesthood.” Those who are in Christ undergo a foundational change in their identity and their purpose.

❓ What factors do you take into consideration when looking to buy new clothes?

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❓ Was there ever a time when you sought to replace your entire wardrobe? What about for your children or someone else in your home? If so, what led to this change?

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Adults may wear the same clothes for years or even decades. Children, on the other hand, need a whole new wardrobe every year. Why is that? It's simple. Kids grow. Adults grow too, but that's a different lesson. Sometimes we wish that children could stop growing. We would save a lot of money and time. But, of course, we don't want that. It isn't right or good if a child never grows, develops, or matures. We want them to grow because they should be making physical, mental, and emotional progress. We want them to mature, and if they don't we become concerned.

First Peter 2:2 says, “Like newborn infants, desire the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow up into your salvation.” According to this verse, what are

children of God to grow up to? To “grow up” into salvation simply means that you are to grow into the salvation that God has given you—you are to “grow into it” as a child should grow into an adult. In our passage today, we will consider the profound change people go through when they experience the grace and mercy of God in Christ.

## Session Summary

God adopts people whom He saves into His family. John 1:12 says, “But to all who did receive him, he gave them the right to be children of God.” Adoption is an act of God in which He makes us members of His family. Today’s passage explains what taking the family name does to a person. When a sin-dead soul is made alive by the grace and mercy of God in Christ, not only are they justified, but also they begin the process of sanctification. This is fitting, and it is inevitable. Those who are in Christ will be steadily conformed to the image of Christ over time.

### 1. Fitting Living (1 Pet. 2:1-3)

One of the most important words in this passage is the first word that we read: “therefore.” This connector word indicates to us that everything we are about to read hinges upon what was said just before. In the first chapter of this letter, Peter emphasized two primary themes. First, he invited his readers to recall and rejoice in the fact that they had been given a “new birth” and a “living hope” (v. 3). Secondly, he expressed the fact that those who are in that blessed spiritual state have been called to holy living. Peter quoted the Old Testament saying, “Be holy because I am holy” (v. 16).

In other words, Peter set before his readers the glorious good work that God had done for them in the person of Christ Jesus. Not only were they rescued from the wrath that they were due for their sins, but He brought them in and made them a part of His household. Peter reminded them of their great hope.

Jesus’ primary mission on earth wasn’t to feed the hungry, heal the sick, or even to teach the masses. Rather, Christ came to give Himself as an atoning sacrifice for sinners. Jesus’ death at the insistence of the Jews and at the hand of the Romans was not a spoiled end to the incarnation but the exact point of the incarnation. What was the meaning of Jesus’ death? Second Corinthians 5:21 may summarize it best: “He made the one who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

The sin of man was imputed to Christ. Christ's righteousness was imputed to man. The word "imputation" is an accounting term; it means "to apply to one's account." The old King James word is "reckon." In theological terms, we speak of a double imputation that takes place in justification. Our sin was applied to Jesus' account at the cross, and Jesus' righteousness was applied to our account.

Jesus' work on the cross gives us a secure hope because the hope was gained by Christ's work alone, not ours. Had we done something to attain our hope, then surely, we could do something to lose it. But we didn't, so we can't. Thus, Jesus was the hope of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He is the hope of the nations. Jesus secured salvation for all that look to him.



How often do you reflect on God's gracious work on your behalf in Christ? What helps you remember the gospel?

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What can you do to be more cognizant of the mercy and grace of God in saving you and adopting you?

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The natural result of what comes before the "therefore" immediately follows it. Peter indicated in the first three verses that Christians live their lives by two general guides. First, they should stop sinning. Be careful to recognize that they weren't begrudgingly avoiding sin because now they owed God something. Their affections and desires have been changed. They now desire God and hate what is opposed to God. Because sin is offensive to their Beloved, they hate it, yet they still struggle with the old nature that continues to desire sin.

Things like malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander hinder our desire for Christ. By getting rid of them, Christians can yearn for spiritual growth in the same way babies yearn for milk. Peter knew this from experience. He understood the ups and downs of a Christian walk. He had numerous moments that revealed his need for

spiritual maturity even with Jesus physically in his midst. Peter also knew that the Lord is good and because of that He wants believers to connect with Him.

Secondly, Christians will now pursue God through faith and obedience. Peter made it clear that God's Word was key to that endeavor: "Desire the pure milk of the Word." What's important to note here is the precept that the inner condition is the foundation for outward good works.

**?** Why does it matter that our good works be undergirded and preceded by a right heart? Can you think of a time when Jesus spoke about the inconsistency of outward works and inward reality? What was His tone?

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Glorifying God doesn't mean just doing right; it means being right. Christians are made righteous in the sight of God once for all in Christ. That's called justification. It's a one-time event that is accomplished fully by God Himself. The work of salvation doesn't stop there, however. Though Christians are assured of their place in God's family, they are then called to live as His children. That's what Paul meant when he said that Christians are to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12). Christians are to become more and more like Jesus as they await His coming. Becoming more like Jesus is both an inward and outward transformation. Jesus was probably the harshest with those who excelled at outward forms of devotion while remaining spiritually bankrupt inside. Listen to what He said to the religious leaders in Israel, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which appear beautiful on the outside, but inside are full of the bones of the dead and every kind of impurity" (Matt. 23:27).

**?** Application: Is your life distinct from the world because of the work of Christ on your behalf and in your soul? What specific areas of your life have been significantly affected by God's work of salvation in your life?

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## 2. Real Identity (1 Pet. 2:4-5,9-10)

The opening few words of this section—“as you come to him”—are significant because they show that believers are actively participating in God’s work and God’s purpose on a daily basis. Peter was called by Christ, and he came to Christ again and again throughout his life.

Peter revealed an astounding piece of information in this passage. We are wise to try and capture the full weight of what he meant. Peter wrote twice that those who had been born again were now part of a “priesthood.”



What do you know about the role of a priest in the Old Testament? What were his duties?

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The priests of the nation of Israel were a special class of people set apart to be the individuals who mediated between God and the nation through prayer, sacrifice, and worship. They were the ones who went into God’s presence and experienced His glory.

This is astounding news! Those who have been redeemed by the blood of Christ now have the privileges of the Old Testament priests. They have direct access to the one true and living God to pray, worship, and serve Him with no barriers and no distance. This is possible because of what Christ has done on their behalf. Now, those who are in Christ are to “proclaim the praises of the one who called [them] out of darkness into his marvelous light” (v. 9).



What does it mean that Christians are a part of a “priesthood” and not just individual priests?

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Christians aren't independent, autonomous individuals who worship and serve the Lord alone. Rather, God has instituted His church through which this "royal priesthood" is to live out their calling. Individual Christians gather and covenant together in local churches. They submit to one another. They worship and serve the Lord together as a body. They edify and encourage one another by using their gifts. A Christian's identity isn't found so much in his or her individual relationship with God (though this is important) as it is in belonging to and functioning in the people of God.

**?** Application: Are you committed to serving and worshiping the one and true and living God by being an active and faithful member of our church? If you are a part of a "holy priesthood," what do you think that means regarding the priority you should give to involvement and love for the local church?

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### 3. A Stone in Zion (1 Pet. 2:6-8)

Now we arrive at the linchpin of this passage. Peter pictured Christ as a stone in this passage with references to several Old Testament verses.

Peter referred to Isaiah 28:16 in verse 4 and then quoted it in verse 6. Then in verse 7, Peter quoted Psalm 118:22, naming Jesus as the cornerstone. The stone imagery takes off from there; Christ is the cornerstone, the stone on which the entire building is set. Churches, bodies of believers, are the stones that are built up together to form a spiritual house. These stones work together to form the structure as a church; it is not about any individual but about how individuals can be concerned for one another in the church and for those who will come after them.

**?** According to Peter, what were the two ways in which the stone functioned?

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Christ, the stone in Zion, was either the honored cornerstone or He was a stone to stumble over. Christ was either cherished and worshiped or He was an offense. Peter wrote that those who honored the cornerstone and believed would “never be put to shame” while others were destined to stumble over the stone because they disobey the word (vv. 6-8).

Christians are often reviled, mocked, and accused of intolerance in today’s culture because of this very teaching. The contention of popular culture in the West today is to assert that any claims on exclusivity of truth are intolerant. In fact, Peter may very well be accused of hate speech today. Yet Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6).

### What does the “exclusivity of Christ” mean?

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The “exclusivity of Christ” refers to the belief that there is only one way to heaven. The opposite of this teaching is “universalism.” This idea argues that there are many ways to God and everyone must find their own road. It is often likened to various trails leading to the peak of a mountain. There are many roads, but they all lead to the top. This is not what the Bible teaches. The Bible is clear that there is only one road to salvation, and that road is Jesus Christ. All other roads lead to an eternity separated from God.

It’s for this reason that we prioritize the spiritual mandate over the social mandate. The spiritual mandate is the biblical imperative to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with all people groups. The social mandate is the biblical imperative to meet the temporal needs (for example, hunger) of those in our communities. Both are mandates, but the spiritual mandate is more important because it deals with eternal issues, whereas the social mandate deals with temporal issues.

### Application: What is Christ to you—a stone over which you have stumbled or the honored cornerstone of your life? How can you know?

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## Conclusion

In this letter, Peter sought to encourage and equip the Christian churches outside of Israel. These would have been made up of both Jews and Gentiles. He endeavored to make them see who they were, what made them that way, and what it meant for everyday life.

 Is there a “therefore” in your life? In other words, do you have a testimony of life without the grace and mercy of Christ but now a life that is nothing but His grace and mercy?

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 For those who are in Christ, is your life marked by fleeing from sin and desiring the things of God, especially the pure milk of His Word? Explain your thoughts.

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 How does knowing that you are a part of a royal priesthood change the way you think about your local church and your involvement there? In what ways is our church better together?

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**CHRIST CONNECTION:** Christ was presented by Peter in this passage as both the chosen and honored stone as well as the rejected stone. The person and work of Christ is the winnowing fork separating those who stumble and disobey from those who receive mercy.

**MISSIONAL APPLICATION:** Christians have not stumbled over Christ the cornerstone, but have believed. Christians must do the work of laying this stone before others, knowing that it will be offensive to some, but to others it will be the cornerstone upon which their eternity is built.



# FOR NEXT WEEK

## The Church: Love For One Another

### Main Passages

- 1 John 3:11-24

### Session Outline

1. Supplying Physical Needs (1 John 3:17)
2. Loving by Telling (1 John 3:18)
3. Encouragement Toward Good Works (1 John 3:14)

### Memorize

*Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all slander.  
<sup>2</sup> Like newborn infants, desire the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may  
grow up into your salvation, <sup>3</sup> if you have tasted that the Lord is good.*

- 1 Peter 2:1-3, CSB

### Daily Readings

- Monday - 1 Peter 2:1-10
- Tuesday - 1 Corinthians 12:12-14
- Wednesday - Ephesians 4:1-6
- Thursday - Galatians 3:28
- Friday - 1 Corinthians 1:10
- Saturday - Colossians 3:12-14