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“Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house,” I Peter 2:5a.

## Living Stones

**Lesson Aim:** To help believers to find their places as living stones in God's house.

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### INTRODUCTION

The varied and manifold relationships of the believer with God are set forth in the Bible through various figures of speech. Believers are called the family of God, a flock, the body of Christ, an army, and a building. The latter is the figure used in this study. Just as a house is made of brick, so Peter calls believers “living stones” in the spiritual house which God is building.

Men live in houses. So God lives in the spiritual house composed of living stones. Every believer can have a place to fill in the “building of God.” In erecting a building for habitation here, we want every stone to be in its proper place. So each believer is important in the local congregation of believers for he is a stone in that spiritual building.

The local church is the spiritual building which God builds and strengthens by the addition of “living stones.” It is His purpose to dwell within the church, Ephesians 2:19-22. He has decreed that He is to be glorified in the church throughout all ages, world without end, Ephesians 3:20-21. It is important, therefore, that each believer fill the place God has for him in the local congregation. This study aims “to help believers to find their places as living stones in God’s house.” One defeats God’s purpose in his life unless he fills the place that God intends in the spiritual building.

When each brother in the church fills the place assigned of God, the spiritual life and strength of the church will be evident and God will be

glorified. This lesson must be studied with attention directed to one's own heart and life. As a "living stone," is God being glorified because of your filling the place He assigned you in His church?

## EXPOSITION

### I. THEIR NATURE, 2:1-5.

Jesus Christ is the Chief Corner Stone of God's spiritual building. Believers are the lesser stones whom God has united and based upon Jesus Christ the Foundation. What is the nature of those who make up the spiritual house of God?

1. Purified.—Those who are saved put away once for all those sins in which they lived and revelled, verse 1. But salvation does not make one immune to temptation. Many former sins entice and beckon the believer even though he is "a new creature in Christ Jesus," II Corinthians 5:17. Being "washed, sanctified, justified" by the Lord Jesus, the life of the believer is to match his experience in grace, I Corinthians 6:11. It is important that the purified be sanctified. So, using the terminology of everyday life, Peter says, "Put off the former sins as you would change a garment and change the whole habit of your life." What things are to be put off? The sins of the heart and conduct. "Malice" is an evil attitude which rejoices in the misfortunes of others. "Guile" is an evil spirit which deals in trickery and craftiness, "Hypocrisy" is an insincere spirit which pretends to be what one is not. All these are sins of the heart. "All evil speaking" is a sin of the tongue. All such things are contrary to the high calling of a Christian.

The Bible calls for purity among God's people. "If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work," II Timothy 2:21. "And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure," I John 3:3. Only pure and holy stones should appear in a spiritual house erected for the dwelling place of God.

2. Growing.—The Bible is the key to vibrant Christian growth. Like a newborn child will cry out for milk when it is hungry so the believer's soul will cry out for communion with God in His Word, verse 2. D. L. Moody once said, "This Book will keep you from sin, or sin will keep you from this book." Most backsliding begins with a neglect of the Bible, So Peter advises all believers to be fervent students of the Word even yearning intensely for its nourishment.

The Bible calls itself "food," "milk" and "honey"--food to eat, milk to

drink and honey for dessert! No wonder the believer's soul yearns for the Book. It is a complete meal of spiritual sustenance with nothing extra added.

The neglect of this desire for the Word will produce a deformed spiritual life. Such lack of development will express itself in complaints, backsliding, and open sin. When once the Lord has been received by faith and His graciousness tasted of, the heart is never satisfied unless it drinks of His fullness daily.

3. Experience.—**“O taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man that trusteth in him,”** Psalm 34:8. The believer has tasted of the goodness of the Lord Jesus, verse 3. This “taste” brought redemption. How much more of the fulness of God will be received and enjoyed by those who eat daily at the table of spiritual supply provided in Him! **“For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power,”** Colossians 2:9-10.

One can taste of food only by receiving it, chewing it, and making it a part of himself. There must be a personal contact in order to taste. Those who have “tasted” come into a personal relationship with God through Jesus—know by experience that He is good. They find their greatest joy in Him. Their life is never complete without His manifest presence. **“Thou wilt shew me the path of life; in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore,”** Psalm 16:11.

Jesus is “a living stone . . . chosen of God, and precious,” verse 4, Those who know Him as Saviour still testify thus. Ask a believer. Ask your own heart. Know by experience the preciousness of the Lord.

4. Dedicated,—All the blessedness of knowing Jesus is not private. Blessings are shared in company with other believers. The unity of the church is reflected in these words: **“Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ,”** verse 5. The House of God is made up of Jesus, the Chief Corner Stone, and believers, the lesser stones built upon Him. This is as Jesus promised, **“Upon this rock (Himself as the Son of God) I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it,”** Matthew 16:18.

Believers are not passive in fulfilling their place in God's spiritual house. In His house there must be sacrifices and priests to offer them. So Peter changes the picture slightly to say believers are also “a holy priesthood.” Clothed in the garments of holiness and love, believers offer up sacrifices to God.

Observe the kind of sacrifice God wants. He cares not for sacrifices as were offered upon Jewish altars of long ago. He cares not for the supposed

sacrifices in the mass as offered upon Roman Catholic altars today. The sacrifices God desires are “spiritual sacrifices.” **“By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name. But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased,”** Hebrews 13:15-16.

## II. THEIR LORD, 2:6-8.

1. Chief.—The Lord Jesus is the Chief Corner Stone of the spiritual building where God dwells, verse 6. Such a title is given him in the Old Testament by Jacob, Moses, David, Isaiah, and Daniel. (See Genesis 49:24; Deuteronomy 32:4; Psalm 62:1-2, 6; Isaiah 28:16; Daniel 2:44-45). With this testimony, Paul agrees, **“For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Christ Jesus,”** I Corinthians 3:11.

The church is built upon a firm foundation. The prophets and apostles, with Christ as the cornerstone, compose it, Ephesians 2:20. The chief corner stone was the key to erecting a building in ancient times. Upon it the superstructure depended. By it the walls were set and kept straight. Without it the builder would be unable to erect a suitable building. Just so Jesus is the Chief Corner Stone of the church—God's spiritual house—without Whom the church would never exist.

2. Precious.—**“Unto you therefore which believe he is precious,”** verse 7a. He is “the chiefest among ten thousand,” Song of Solomon, 5:10. He is the “one pearl of great price,” (Matthew 13:26) the possession of Whom is worth the loss of all else, Philippians 3:8. He is the only Saviour since “there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved,” Acts 4:12. He is the only foundation which can be laid, I Corinthians 3:11. He is precious!

The Lord Jesus is precious because of Who He is, what He has done for us, and His position at the head of the redeemed host as Captain of our salvation. He is precious only to believers. Unbelievers may admire His devotion, marvel at His teachings, wonder at His power, and stand amazed at His person, but He is not precious to them. Only by faith can a man understand Jesus aright, love Him sincerely, and know His preciousness.

Not only is Jesus precious to us, as our beloved friend, but his worth and beauty in the mind of God are passed on to us who believe; so that our dull common nature flashes in the excellence of his loveliness . . . Iron touches magnetized iron and becomes magnetic. Stones touch **the Stone** and become Jewels.”— F. B. Meyer. **“Unto you therefore which believe he is**

precious.” verse 7a.

3. Unappreciated. —The Chief Corner Stone has been rejected by many, verse 7b. This is the most tragic story in human history. John expresses it thus: **"He came unto His own (things) and His own (people) received Him not,"** John 1:11. Over seven hundred years before, the prophet Isaiah foretold this would happen: **"He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief,"** Isaiah 53:3.

Though the Stone was readily available and provided that men might build upon it. He was unrecognized and rejected. Builders still reject it. While many admire the Lord, they do not serve Him. To reject the Stone provided of God is to build one's house on the sand. Jesus warned against such a course for it will surely end in tragedy and great loss, Matthew 7:24-27. How tragic that Jesus is still “disallowed indeed of men” though He is chosen of God!

4. Elect.—Though rejected by men, the Chief Corner Stone is chosen of God, verses 6-8. Though smitten by men, He is elect of God. Though rejected by men, He is precious to God. Though counted unworthy by men, He is acclaimed precious to God. The Stone, which should have been a foundation, became a cause of stumbling to those who rejected Jesus. Men either receive Jesus and benefit by His presence or they reject Him and stumble over His claims the rest of their lives.

The Elect One of God is not to be lightly considered. Men will build upon that Stone which God provided or be crushed by it. Those who find “scandal” (the meaning of “offence” in verse 8) in the person of the Lord Jesus will themselves be scandalized in the day of judgment. This is ordained of God.

When Jesus was born God sent the angels to sing His pleasure in His only begotten Son. When Jesus was baptized God spoke from Heaven, **“This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”** Matthew 3:17. When Jesus was transfigured on the mountain God once again spoke words of delight, **“This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him,”** Matthew 17:5. Peter further testifies of Jesus, **“Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins,”** Acts 5:31. He is “elect, precious” to God.

### III. THEIR POSITION, 2:9-12.

1. Chosen.—The holy and spiritual nature of the church is evident in Peter's description of her members; **“But ye are a chosen generation, a royal**

**priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people,”** verse 9. Observe the four-fold description here given.

(1) Believers are a “chosen generation” (meaning, “an elect race”) in that God is pleased to use them to pass His blessings on to others. Their election (choosing) is not for their sakes but for the good of those whom they can serve in the gospel.

(2) Believers are “a royal priesthood” because they are kings and priests unto God, Revelation 1:6. As such they, like Melchizedek, are sons of the King of all the earth and serve the spiritual benefits of men as they represent their Father.

(3) Believers are “a holy nation” because their citizenship is in heaven, Philippians 3:20. When national Israel turned from her mission under God, He chose to spread the Gospel through spiritual Israel—His believing children whether they are Jews or Gentiles. For in Christ Jesus there is “neither Jew nor Gentile . . . for ye are all one,” Galatians 3:28.

(4) Believers are “a peculiar people” because they belong to God. (“Peculiar” does not mean “queer” but rather “belonging to God—a people of God's own possession.”) Such are you if you believe in Jesus Christ to the saving of your soul and are added to one of His churches by His blessed Spirit.

2. Purpose.—God's purpose in each of His children is “that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light,” verse 9b. This passage tells you exactly why God saved you. The testimony concurs with the statement of Paul in Ephesians 1:2, **“That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ.”**

How is God glorified in the lives of His children? By word, conduct, attitude or any other way in which the spirit of Jesus may be seen. Look at the way you act at your home, at work, and in social relationships. When others see you, do they take knowledge of you that you have been with Jesus? (See Acts 4:13.) If Christ is not seen in your life, you are missing the very purpose for which God saved you. No person is saved just to get him to heaven. He is saved that God may be glorified in him. What have you done this week to the glory of God?

3. Relationship.—The amazing ministry of grace is evidenced in the statement of verse 10. God has taken a people who were enemies and aliens and made them His very own. Hosea the prophet told of a time when those who were not a people would be called the people of God and those who had not known mercy would receive mercy to the forgiveness of their sins, Hosea 2. Paul repeated the wonder of it in Romans 5 showing that those who

were “without strength . . . ungodly . . . sinners . . . enemies” were included in the redemption provided in Jesus Christ. Amazing grace!

The relationship which now exists between the believer and God is that of the child and his Father. John testifies, “. . . **as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name,**” John 1:12. In another epistle he adds, “**Beloved, now are we the sons of God . . .**” I John 3:2. Believers are no longer “strangers and foreigners” but as children of God have entered the household of God as fellowcitizens with the saints, Ephesians 2:19. It is a marvel of grace that we look up to God and say, “Our Father.”

4. Purity.—Since believers belong to God they are as “strangers and pilgrims” to the world and the lusts thereof, verse 11. Peter admonishes a life of purity in calling for a constant warfare against fleshly lusts. “Lust” is an inordinate desire—the desire for too much of a good thing or for any of a bad thing. It usually refers to the grosser sins of the flesh which satisfy the animal passions of the human being. “Look out,” Peter warns, “for such lusts war against the soul!”

There is a constant battle which goes on between the flesh and the Spirit. Read I Galatians 5:16-24 to see the manner of life when the flesh controls (adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, etc.) and the difference when the Spirit controls (love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance). No wonder Peter warns that fleshly lusts “war against the soul” and hinder the spiritual development of a man. No wonder Paul admonishes, “Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh . . . If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit,” Galatians 5:16, 25.

5. Witness.—The believer is to adorn his profession by upright conduct which will witness to others that he belongs to the Lord, verse 12. An unworthy walk by a professed believer gives the enemy an opportunity to blaspheme the Lord Jesus. It is best for us so to live that, even though some may speak evil of us, our upright lives will lead them to glorify God. Jesus said, “**Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven,**” Matthew 5:16. After all, isn't this the reason why God saved us? Read Ephesians 1:12! By consistent lives believers shut the mouths of those who vilify them and cause their very foes to bear witness that they have been with Jesus, Acts 4:13.

## CONCLUSION

God has saved you for a purpose: “**That we should be to the praise of**

**his glory . . .”** Ephesians 1:12. One way God can be glorified in your life is for you to fill the place in His building, the church, as a “living stone” set by the Master Builder. Every believer should take his place in the local church and serve God there. No higher glory could come to any believer than to serve so.

“Now therefore ye are more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God: And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit,” Ephesians 2:19-22.

### QUESTIONS

1. What is a “living stone” in today's study?
2. Who is the Chief Corner Stone?
3. How does one become a “living stone”?
4. What is the purpose of this spiritual building?
5. Why was the Chief Stone rejected by men?
6. How does He become precious to men?
7. Why is He precious to God?
8. How are believers “peculiar” people?
9. How does this study relate to your local church?