

COMMUNITY

Becoming a Spiritual House of Holy Priests

Offering Spiritual Sacrifices – 1 Peter 2:4-5

Sunday, 28 June 2020 (By Marius Gradwell)



Our Theme: Cultivating a vibrant, biblical, gospel-centred, kingdom community.

Today's message follows on my previous message on "The Priesthood of all Believers" (14 June 2020)

1 Peter was written to encourage people who were emotionally drained and disorientated by traumatic historical and social events. They were deeply impacted by the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple, the dwelling place of God, and they were experiencing alienation and suffering as outsiders of the social and political system. Peter invited his readers to keep coming to Jesus and to allow themselves to be built up into a spiritual household of God. That was good news for people experiencing homelessness and wondering where God was in all of this. 1 Peter empowers its readers to choose. They do not need to search for home or God's presence; they can choose to be the place of God's presence as well as home and family for the homeless!

Text: 1 Peter 2:4-5

And coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected by men, but choice and precious in the sight of God, (5) you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

How Spiritual Sacrifices Become Acceptable to God

Notice, in these verses, six steps in the way God gets spiritual sacrifices acceptable to Him.

1. Jesus Christ, the Living Stone

First, in verse 4, there is Jesus Christ the living Stone. Peter calls him a stone because of prophecies in the Old Testament. (Isaiah 28:16, Psalm 118:22)

2. Those Longing for Him Come to Him

Second, those who have tasted that the Lord is kind and now long for him the way a baby longs for milk—they now (in verse 4) come to him.

1 Peter 2:2-3 ESV (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.*

3. We Are Shaped into Living Stones

Third, the result of this coming to Jesus is that we are shaped into living stones for use in a spiritual building. (Verse 5)

4. We Are Built into a Spiritual House

Fourth, when we come to the living stone and are shaped into living stones ourselves, we are built into a "spiritual house." Christ is the builder here. He builds individual Christians into a spiritual temple. It is spiritual because it houses the Holy Spirit.

5. We Are a Holy Priesthood

Fifth, not only are we living stones being built into a spiritual house for God's habitation, we are also a "holy priesthood." In other words, we are not merely the passive building where God dwells; we are also the active participants – that is, priests – all of us.

We all are the priests of this new spiritual house, and our privilege now as priests is to draw near to God with spiritual sacrifices.

6. Spiritual Sacrifices Are Offered to God Through Christ

Sixth, the goal of all this is that spiritual sacrifices would be offered which are acceptable to God.

And we can only do that "through Jesus Christ." Jesus is the Living Stone. Everything hangs on our coming to the Living Stone. If we don't come to Jesus, the Living Stone, then we don't have life and we are not built into a spiritual house, and we do not become a holy priesthood, and we will not offer spiritual sacrifices. It all hangs on Jesus and connecting with Jesus—coming to Jesus.

What Are These Spiritual Sacrifices?

Now let us walk backward through some of these six steps and take another look at them.

What are these spiritual sacrifices that we offer to God through Jesus Christ?

In Romans 12:1 Paul says that we are to present our bodies as living sacrifices holy and acceptable to God which is your spiritual service of worship. That means, that everything you do with your body is to be done as an act of worship to God.

It might include singing or speaking words of praise as in Hebrews 13:15. Spiritual sacrifices are the praises and thanks of God's people alone and in group worship.

Or it might include acts of love like giving and sharing. For example, in Philippians 4:18 Paul receives gifts of support from the Philippian church and says, "I received from Epaphroditus what you have sent, a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God."

And in Hebrews 13:16 it says, "Do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased."

What then are spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ?

They are the deeds you do, the words you speak, the songs you sing—when you do them spiritually. That is, when you do them in reliance on the power of the Spirit, according to the will of the Spirit, and for a manifestation of the Spirit—which is a manifestation of Christ.

What We Should Ask About Our Worship

Is our worship spiritual? If it is not, it is not acceptable to God. If it is, he will accept it, not because it is perfect—it never will be in this age—much less because it is refined or well-crafted, but because it comes "through Jesus Christ." Spiritual sacrifices are sacrifices from Christ and through Christ and for Christ. They get their power from the Spirit of Christ, they get their content from the Word of Christ, and they have their goal in the glory of Christ. And they flow from a heart devoted to his power and his Word and his glory. And that is the only kind of worship God accepts.

Spiritual Sacrifices Offered by a Holy Priesthood

The second step in moving backward through the six steps is that these spiritual sacrifices are offered by a holy priesthood. That is not the pastors and the elders, that is not the worship team; it is all of us. This means that all of us have access to God through Jesus Christ.

You do not take your sacrifice to the priest and watch while he takes it to the altar. You all are called by God to approach the altar and the throne, and to make your own personal sacrifice in personal life and in collective worship.

And therefore, you must be holy. You must be set apart for God. Cleansed by the blood of Christ. You are a priest to God. You are a part of a worship team, called "the holy priesthood." Without this God-bought holiness we do not offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

The Holy Priesthood Is Also a Spiritual House

Third, this holy priesthood is also a "spiritual house." We are all living stones built by God into a spiritual house, that is, a temple made for the presence of a holy God. Listen to the way Paul said this in 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, (20) built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, (21) in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. (22) In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

The main thing here is that we as a church are meant by Christ to be a collective dwelling of God in the Spirit. It is true that each of us is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19).

But there is more of God to be known and enjoyed than anyone can know in isolation. We are being fitted together, Paul says, for a temple and for a dwelling of God by his Spirit. There is a presence and power and manifestation of the Spirit of God meant to be known in this spiritual house, a Gospel-centred kingdom community that we do not know at any other time in isolation.

We are not just isolated living stones. We are, verse 5 says, being built (by Christ—"I will build my church") as a spiritual house.

How Are We Being Built into a Spiritual House?

And to that end let me just return to the strategy Peter focuses on for this to happen. He says in verse 4, "And coming to Him [Christ] as to a living stone, rejected by men, but chosen and precious in the sight of God, you also, as living stones, are being built." How are we being built into this spiritual house? By coming to Christ.

Now be careful here. This is not a reference to conversion—that initial coming to Christ, though that it awesomely important and I pray some may come this morning for the first time. It is a reference to daily, hour-by-hour drawing near to Christ as a strong, living Person.

Notice, verse 4 flows out of verse 3 and refers back to it with the word "him." Verse 4: "Coming to HIM"—to whom? To the one whose kindness you have tasted—how good it is. This helps us get a good handle on what "coming to Christ" means. Verse 3 is an incentive in both directions. It motivates verse 2 and it motivates verse 4.

If you have tasted the kindness of the Lord—then (v. 2) long for the Word of Christ, the way a baby longs for milk. If you have tasted the kindness of the Lord—then (v. 4) come to Christ. Coming to Christ is what you do when you long for his Word the way a baby longs for milk, and, longing for it, come to it and feed on it and find Christ in it.

If we are going to be a spiritual temple for God's presence, and if we are going to be a holy priesthood, and if we are going to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God, then we must day-by-day, hour-by-hour come to Christ. We must taste his kindness by feeding on his Word—his promises, his commands, his teachings, his warnings—until we are so filled with him that his Word will dwell among us richly as we teach and admonish one another with thankfulness in our hearts to God.



Pause/Play

Discuss the picture below...

As a Priest... I offer spiritual sacrifices...
I minister to God...
and I minister to my fellow man...

Share your understanding
of what it means,
and your practical
experience...

