

## Lavish Grace, Part 4 Christ—the Cornerstone

“It’s been weird to watch white people report on this. You know when you just showed that graph of the decline in the numbers. I thought, ‘Maybe that’s why they’re trying to eliminate all these abortions and stuff. They’re trying to build up the race.’”<sup>1</sup>



How many of you remember this picture, taken in May of 2008? The foundation of this building had just been dug and a heavy rain turned it into a manmade lake. The problem stemmed from the fact that our land was mostly a mucky clay which not only holds in water but also makes for a very poor foundation. As a result, the estimated cost for our foundation doubled in price. The

foundation had to be significantly beefed up to make up for the poor soil conditions. The final foundation on which the cement walls were placed was a massive intertwine of steel and concrete well beyond what you’d might expect or anything I have ever seen. But it had to be done because we all understand that the foundation of a building is everything.

If this is true for something as simple as our modest church building then it is especially true in the spiritual realm of God’s kingdom. This morning we will look our final two aspects of lavish grace, which are both built upon Jesus Christ, the Cornerstone. Please turn to 1 Peter chapter 2.

*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,”*

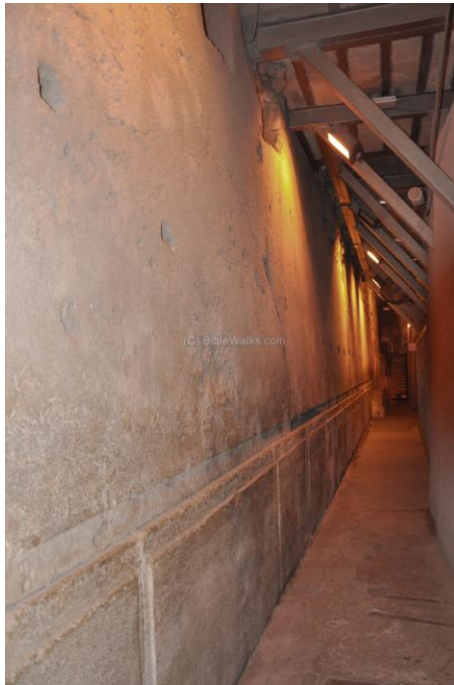
*8 and “A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense.”*

*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.*

*11 Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. 12 Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.*

## Christ—the Cornerstone



The big idea of this passage is the fact that Jesus Christ is our Cornerstone. There are many analogies and applications that could be pulled from this fact. Jesus is like a rock—firm and secure, like the song, Jesus, you're my firm foundation. He is the foundation for our faith. The cornerstone of a building is the key piece of the foundation. For example, this stone which forms part of the foundation of the Wailing wall in Jerusalem is the third largest stone ever used in a structure and weighs in at approximately 1.5 million pounds. All angles of the building flow from a cornerstone and all foundation stones are laid upon it. Unless you are built upon the rock, your spiritual house will be washed away in the storms of life, just as Jesus himself shared in one of his parables.

There are many things such as these that Peter could have said in regard to Christ as the Cornerstone, but he did not choose any of them. Instead, Peter said this about Jesus. He is *a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious*. Then Peter proceeded to prove his

point by quoting from three different Old Testament passages.

*“Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone,  
a cornerstone **chosen and precious**,  
and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.” (Isa 28:16)*

*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,” (Psalm 118:22)*

*8 and “A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense.” (Isa. 8:14)*

First of all, we are reminded that Jesus is rejected by men. Of course this is not just something that happened in the first century but has continued every moment of every day since Jesus ascended to heaven. The world rejects Jesus so we should never be surprised when the world rejects us as well. Many of our struggles in life come as a result of our not being willing to compromise our faith.



Julia Ward knows quite a bit about rejection. In 2009, as a graduate student in counseling at Eastern Michigan University, which happens to be Karen's alma mater, Julia refused to provide counseling for a gay client because she believed it would violate her Christian beliefs. She was immediately kicked out of the university for her unwillingness to compromise her faith. Thankfully for her and all of us, the Alliance Defense Fund took up and won her case and this past summer the

Michigan legislature passed a new bill aptly named the "Julia Ward Freedom of Conscience Act." This story had a happy ending but increasingly, I don't think this will be the case in our country and certainly is already not the case everywhere else in the world.

Seven hundred years before Christ was born, Isaiah wrote that Jesus would be "stone of stumbling and a rock of offense." Do not be surprised when the world rejects Jesus and do not fear when they reject you as you seek to follow Jesus.

Peter emphasized Jesus' rejection by men but he also shared how the Father delights in his Son, saying that Jesus is chosen by the Father and precious to Him. This illustrates the eternal and perfect love within the Godhead. When Jesus was baptized, the Father announced to everyone, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:17). When Jesus was transfigured on the mountain, the Father again spoke audibly, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him" (Matt. 17:5).

The Father loves the Son with an infinite and intimate love. Why are we to demonstrate love to others? 1 John 4 says that "we love because he first loved us." Our love is fixed upon and driven by the sacrificial love of Christ toward us while we were still his enemy. But our love toward one another also flows out of the perfect love within the Trinity. Jesus demonstrated his love for us on the cross because of the perfect love within the Godhead that had existed for all eternity. Jesus loved broken and lost sinners because the Father loved him. Through the blood of Christ, we were chosen and precious to Jesus because Jesus was chosen and precious to the Father.

### **Living Stones**

But there is more to this foundation built upon Christ. Peter said that you and I are living stones. There are two things that are remarkable about this comparison. The first is that we are like Jesus because he is also a living stone. It is stunning that we could share the exact same comparison as Christ. We are not the foundation, but we are nevertheless living stones.

The second remarkable thing is that a living stone is a bold metaphor because stones are inanimate objects. Stones are not carbon based life forms but rather mere rocks lifted from a quarry. The Bible constantly uses living things by which to compare human characteristics and tendencies. The Psalmist wrote that we are like a deer that pants for water and like a "tree planted by streams of water" (Psalm 1:1). Isaiah states that "All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field" (Isaiah 40:6). This is why "living stones" is such a remarkable and

bold metaphor because stones are not living things.<sup>2</sup> We are living because we are born again, made alive, what we talked about last Sunday.

But not only are we living stones built upon the foundation of Christ the cornerstone, but we are also being built into a spiritual house. Here again we see the building metaphor expanded. We are perhaps more accustomed to the body illustration. You and I are the hands and feet and Christ is the head of the body. Somehow that seems to be an easier analogy to grasp because bodies are living things and the body of Christ is a living thing, but the metaphor of a spiritual house is also important and has similar applications.

The ancient city of Sparta (named after the town north on Hwy 27!) was one of the most formidable military powers of its day. There's a story about a Spartan king, Lycurgus, who boasted about the walls of Sparta to a visiting monarch. He claimed that his city was invincible because its protective walls couldn't be breached. When the visiting king actually saw the city of Sparta, to his great surprise there were no walls at all. When he asked, "Where are the walls you've been boasting about?" the Lycurgus proudly pointed to his soldiers and said, "These are the walls of Sparta, every man a brick."<sup>3</sup> If Peter were here today, I think he would say that we all are the spiritual house and every man a stone.—every woman and child a stone.

But we are not just individual stones. I think we often underemphasize the corporate nature of salvation. When we are saved, we are saved out of the kingdom of darkness and into the kingdom of light. We are saved out of the kingdom of Satan and into the kingdom of God. I don't want to discount the salvation of individuals because God obviously consider each person's faith on their own but once we are saved, we are saved in the body of Christ. In this sense, salvation is almost as much a corporate thing as it is an individual thing. God makes us into living stones so that we can be built into a spiritual house. Do you see, the purpose of the stones is not to merely exist as a stone but so that we—together—can be built into a spiritual house.

One application can be illustrated with a simple question. Why do you attend church? The young people might be thinking, "Because mom and dad says we have to." Others attend because they feel it is a kind of duty. Still others enjoy the fellowship with other believers, the worship, the teaching and the whole package deal. But the bottom line answer to the question of why we come to church is because we are living stone being built into a spiritual house. In other words, believers were never meant to exist on their own. A stone lying by itself is still just a stone but only when stones come together can they built into something much greater.

But some might think, well God can build me into a spiritual house without going to a local church because Peter is writing about the universal church, the invisible church throughout all generations and all nations. That is certainly true but the universal church is always manifested through the local church. The local church is the God-ordained, Christ-driven, Holy Spirit-empowered strategy for reaching the world, fulfilling the Great Commission and building his church. There is no other way. So the lone ranger Christians who have rejected the local church so they can be a Bedside Baptist and listen to Pastor Pillow completely fail to understand Scripture.



## **Priesthood of all believers**

But there is much more to being built into a spiritual house. Verse five reads, *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.*

Most of you know my feelings on whether or not you refer to me as pastor. Unless you feel more comfortable calling me pastor Rich I would prefer you just call me Rich. It's totally your call, but I do think it is good to teach your children to call me pastor Rich or Mr. Maurer, not because I am a pastor but to teach respect for all adults. I address other pastors the same way I like to be addressed, which may have gotten me in trouble one time. Several years ago our family was invited to attend the first communion of the child of some friends at St Mary's. At the time, Father Cook was still serving as the priest there. I had regular contact with Father Cook through our ministerial meetings and considered him to be an extremely kind person. When we walked into the church to attend the service, Father Cook had gathered all of the young people around him, complete with their white robes, and they were about to enter the sanctuary together. He saw me come in and greeted me so my natural reaction was to say, quite audibly, "Hi Bob!" I don't think Bob cared one bit, but I can imagine if a committed Catholic had heard me, they would not have been too happy.

Unfortunately, the Catholic Church still holds to the idea of a priest as a mediator between the people and Christ. The Jewish religion did and still does hold to this idea as well—and for good reason since God required this under the old covenant sacrificial system.

But because of the blood of Christ, a new way has been opened into the temple of God. In fact, what kind of house do you think the living stones are formed into? We become the temple of God. There is no longer a need for a physical temple where the priests offer sacrifices because we are the temple of God and we are the priests of God who offer spiritual sacrifices. Verse nine expands on this.

*But you are a chosen race (Isaiah 43:20) , a royal priesthood, a holy nation, (Exodus 19:6) a people for his own possession (Exodus 19:5)*

As you can see, this verse is deeply rooted in O.T. theology. These are all descriptions applied only to Israel but now are applied to all believers. Each of us is a priest of God. This is what is known as the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers.

What are these spiritual sacrifices? There are two basic categories of spiritual sacrifices here. *9 that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.* Verse nine instructs is to witness about Christ using our words—that is what it means to proclaim. Tell people how God took you from the kingdom of darkness and placed you in his kingdom of light. Speak God's truth to others.

And then verses 11-12 describe a proclamation of Godly actions.

*11 Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. 12 Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.*

The world will speak of us as evildoers. Remember, if they hate Christ, they will hate you. But some of them will eventually “see your good deeds and glorify God.” I take this to mean that they will be converted. The “day of visitation” does not mean the day when Christ returns but the day when he visits that person. Peter clearly has Matthew 5:16 in mind here. *In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.* Many will hate us but many will see our good works—our daily lives of seeking to follow Christ—and this will impact them and help move them toward repentance.

Therefore, spiritual sacrifices are proclaiming Christ by word and deed. This means that every act of obedience is a spiritual sacrifice. It means that every time I serve another person, I am acting as a priest before the Lord. The OT often uses the phrase, “pleasing aroma. In fact, it is used 43 times in the Old Testament to describe what happened when the priests offered a sacrifice to the Lord. The Lord witnessed the obedience of their hearts and it became a pleasing aroma. Therefore, each act of love, every time we choose to trust Christ, each time we proclaim him in word and deed, these are spiritual sacrifices that become a pleasing aroma to the Lord.

But these are more than individual commands. Christ the cornerstone is building us into a spiritual house so Peter is speaking here to the church. He means for this proclamation of word and deed to be a corporate endeavor. By this I don’t mean that our service must take place with the four walls of this church building, but that our service stands or falls together.

Since this is true, we need to work together to proclaim Christ with our words. And isn’t that what we heard about this morning with the sharing from the Haiti team? There was proclamation of Christ by word and deed, but especially by deed.

We need to work together to love the poor and downcast with our actions. And isn’t that what we saw this morning with the dedication of our Operation Christmas Child boxes? Not everyone can hop on a plane and serve as a missionary, but anyone can serve as a mission in a box.

We need to work together to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against our soul. We all have passions and sins we struggle with and we need one another to wage the war together. Do not try to live the Christian life alone.

Rich Maurer  
November 18, 2012

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.lifenews.com/2012/11/12/cbss-nancy-giles-whites-want-to-ban-abortion-to-build-up-race/>

<sup>2</sup> Here are two more examples of Jesus’ images and teaching about stones. *And do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father,’ for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham (Matt. 3:9). And some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, rebuke your disciples.” He answered, “I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out” (Luke 19:39-40).*

<sup>3</sup> <http://classics.mit.edu/Plutarch/Lycurgus.html>