

1 Peter 2:4-8

And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is 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. ⁶For this is contained in Scripture: "Behold I lay in Zion a choice stone, a precious cornerstone, and he who believes in Him will not be disappointed." ⁷This precious value then, is for you who believe; but for those who disbelieve, "The stone which the builders rejected, this became the very cornerstone," and, "A stone of stumbling and a rock of offense"; for they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this doom they were also appointed.

The last session can be summed up in this way: Now that we are children of God, we must put aside the old self and fleshly desires and grow and strengthen our spirit through the word. Peter continues this "since we are now children of God" language when he says "And coming to Him". In others words, Peter is saying since you have come to the Lord or since you have put faith in the work of Jesus. The "Him" Peter is referring to is Jesus and Jesus is a living stone. Even in the days of Jesus' life on earth, people rejected Him as the Son of God and Savior that he was (and still is).

Isaiah 53:3 He was despised and forsaken of men, A man of sorrow and acquainted with grief; And like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.

Man found Jesus so appalling that they successfully lobbied to have him put to death. In the eyes of God, however, Jesus was choice and precious. Let's put a little perspective to this. For those who have children, do you see them as worthless and without value? Certainly not! They are full of value and precious to you. The same is true with God and Jesus. First, Jesus is the Son of God. Like you to your children, God views His Son as precious. What if we dig a little deeper than this? Think about this statement for a second: How much more precious is Jesus to God with God knowing that it would be through His Son (Jesus) that the relationship between God and the people of earth could/would be restored?

Peter goes on to say "you also are living stones". Does this mean we are all on the same level of Jesus? Of course not, but this question comes to mind: What is the difference between Jesus as a living stone and us as living stones? We will have to keep reading to get our answer. Verse 6 tells us that God is laying a choice stone (Jesus) in Zion. The scripture also refers to this stone as the cornerstone. But what is a cornerstone? Let's see if scripture can help us a bit.

Ephesians 2:20b-21a ... Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone, ²¹in whom the whole building, being fitted together is growing ...

Merriam-Webster gives these definitions: a stone forming a part of a corner or angle in a wall; a basic element, foundation. The cornerstone holds two distinct functions. It is the foundational stone that was used to keep a building together. It is said that if you were to knock out the cornerstone, the whole building would collapse. Second, the cornerstone is placed first and is used as the reference for the rest of the building. If the cornerstone is off in the slightest, the whole building is off. Jesus, having lived the perfect life, is our “perfectly in place” cornerstone. He is the perfect example of how to live, what to do, what not to do, and is the foundation of the church and our faith. He is the one we should be modeling our lives after.

That helps us understand Jesus’ role as a living stone and cornerstone, but what does it mean that we are living stones as well? Let’s turn to other scriptures to help us figure this out.

1 Corinthians 3:9, ¹⁶For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, God’s building; ¹⁶Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?

Ephesians 2:19-22 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God’s household, ²⁰having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone, ²¹in whom the whole build being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, ²²in whom also you are being built together into a dwelling of God in Spirit.

Being living stones means that we are the living breathing temple of God. In the Old Testament, the temple was made of stone and was built up on a foundation. Today, we are a royal priesthood and the living temple of God created by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

We also need to spend some time exploring what being a royal priesthood and offering spiritual sacrifices means. In the Old Testament, the priests were the only ones allowed in the Holy Place in either the tabernacle or the temple. Going a step further, the high priest was the only one who could enter the Holy of Holies or the presence of God. We have a high priest, Jesus, who has torn the veil and made God’s presence available to us (the royal priesthood). The priests were the ones that would offer sacrifices to God on behalf of the people as well. Peter draws on this image for his message to us in this passage. While we do not necessarily offer sacrifices to God on others’ behalf, we are supposed to offer what Peter calls “spiritual sacrifices”. What is our spiritual sacrifice?

Romans 12:1 Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present you bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.

Hebrews 13:15-16 Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name. ¹⁶And do not neglect doing good and sharing for with such sacrifices, God is pleased.

Philippians 4:18 But I have received everything in full and have an abundance; I am amply supplied having received from Epaphroditus what you have sent, a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God.

All of these passages refer to a sacrificial element of our worship that is pleasing to God. There are a number of other passages in the Bible that speak of other actions as well. I would like to focus on Romans 12:1. With this one figured out, I believe all the rest will fall into place. What does it mean to present your bodies as a living sacrifice?

Romans 6:13-19 and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and you members as instruments of righteousness to God. ¹⁴For sin shall not be master over you, you are not under law, but under grace. ¹⁵What then? Shall we sin because we are not under the law but under grace? May it never be! ¹⁶Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves to the one whom you obey, either sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness? ¹⁷But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, ¹⁸and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. ¹⁹I am speaking in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves to impurity and lawlessness, resulting in further lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness, resulting in sanctification.

The key verses in this passage are verse 13, 16 and 19 (each speaks of “presenting your members”). The important thing to take away from this excerpt from Romans is this: to present yourself as a living sacrifice is to obediently give everything we are, not to sin, but to God as instruments of righteousness. With this in place, the rest will follow, or as Paul says it will result in sanctification.

What happens with those who are not obedient to the word, who have not tasted the goodness of the Lord, who choose to reject the cornerstone? Peter says that the cornerstone then become a stumbling block to them. On the day that Christ comes back, they will be doomed to the appointed consequences of their sinfulness. The Bible is clear about what happens to those who do not have a saving faith in the work of Jesus.

Application Questions

- We often look to someone as an example of how to do something we don't know how to do. Who has been your spiritual example? Has it been Jesus? Has He been the cornerstone of your faith and life?
- In what ways do you feel you have been following Jesus' example?
- In what ways can you grow to follow Jesus' example more closely?
- Have you given everything that you are as a living sacrifice to God?
- What areas of your life are you still holding on to? Why are you holding on to those things?