

Titles of Christians (10)
Living Stones
1 Peter 2:4 – 6
Sermon by Pastor Sylvia Chan

Today we are going to study another title of Christians:

^{NAS} **1 Peter 2:4 – 6** 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. ⁶ For *this* is contained in Scripture: “Behold I lay in Zion a choice stone, a precious corner *stone*, And he who believes in Him shall not be disappointed.” (1Pe 2:4 – 6 NAS)

Here Apostle Peter is calling Christians to come to the Lord Jesus Christ. Here the word “Him” refers to the Lord Jesus Christ; he is a living stone, rejected by men. They killed him by nailing him to the cross. As the Lord Jesus is a living stone, so Christians are living stones. We are being built up into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, and we offer up spiritual sacrifices to God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Please take notice that in this sermon today, I only focus on the living stone. I am not talking about the holy priesthood or the spiritual sacrifices; I will discuss these topics in my next sermon two weeks from now.

This passage contains several spiritual terms, and we need to find out the meaning of these terms one by one. Now let us study this passage step by step.

What is a living stone?

First of all, what is a living stone?

There are lots of stones lying on the ground everywhere, with different shapes, different sizes and different colors. There are big stones and small stones, but none of these has life. Only human beings, animals, plants and flowers have life. If we cut into a chicken it will bleed, the blood will come out. If we cut into a plant, it will also bleed, the sap will come out. But if we smash a stone with a hammer or some heavy tool, it would shatter, but it won't bleed because there is no life in it.

Yet this passage says that the Lord Jesus is a living stone (in v.4), and Christians are also living stones (in v. 5). Living stones are stones that have life. By contrast, all the stones on earth don't have life, so literal living stones don't exist in this world. Living stones are found only in the Kingdom of God.

The Lord Jesus Christ is the foundation stone of the spiritual house

Verse 4 says that the Lord Jesus is a living stone, yet verse 6 says: "For *this* is contained in Scripture: 'Behold I lay in Zion a choice stone, a precious corner stone, ...'" So the Lord Jesus is more than a living stone, he is a living corner stone.

What does corner stone refer to? I am talking about the biblical meaning of corner stone as found in the Bible, not the meaning found in an English dictionary.

The original Greek word for corner stone is "ἀκρογωνιαίος" (*akrogōniaios*). According to the Greek-English dictionaries, this word *akrogōniaios* means a corner foundation stone. In the Greek Old Testament, this word is also used in the book of Isaiah.

^{NAU} **Isaiah 28:16** Therefore thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a tested stone, A costly cornerstone for the foundation, firmly placed. He who believes *in it* will not be disturbed." (Isa 28:16 NAU)

Here it says "A costly corner stone for the foundation"; this passage confirms that a corner stone is the foundation of a building, and is essential to the construction.

1 Peter 2:6 says that the Lord Jesus is the corner stone of the spiritual house, yet a corner stone means the foundation; so the Lord Jesus is the foundation of the spiritual house.

The spiritual house is the Temple of Yahweh God

But what does this spiritual house stand for?

Verse 5 (1 Peter 2:5) says, "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."

Please take notice here, that this spiritual house is where the spiritual sacrifices are offered to God! The spiritual sacrifices are offered in this spiritual house, therefore this spiritual house refers to the Temple of God! That is because the sacrifices to God can only be offered in the Temple of God, not anywhere else! Before the Temple was built, the priests would offer sacrifices in the

Tabernacle. After the Temple was built in Jerusalem, the priests would offer sacrifices to God in the Temple.

But this spiritual house refers to a spiritual Temple, not the physical Temple in Jerusalem. The physical Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed in AD 70; since then there has been no physical Temple. So what then is the spiritual Temple?

^{NAU} **1 Corinthians 3:16–17** Do you not know that you are a temple of God and *that* the Spirit of God dwells in you? ¹⁷ If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are. (1Co 3:16–17 NAU)

Here apostle Paul is saying to the Corinthian church that “you are a temple of God”.

^{NAS} **2 Corinthians 6:16** Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, “I will dwell in them and walk among them; And I will be their God, and they shall be My people.” (2Co 6:16 NAS)

Here in this passage apostle Paul again says to the Corinthian church that, “For we are the temple of the living God...”

These two passages, 1 Corinthians 3:16 – 17 and 2 Corinthians 6:16, show that the church is the spiritual temple of God. Please take notice, the church is a gathering of Christians who are called out by God; the church is not a physical building. A building is simply the meeting place of the church. The church building can be moved from this place to the other place, and it will collapse over time. But the church of Yahweh God has stood for two thousand years from the time the Lord Jesus was taken up to heaven until today, and it will continue to stand until the Lord Jesus Christ returns to earth. All the Christians who have existed from the past to the future combine together to form the church of God.

The church is the spiritual temple of God. The church is not in this building or that building, nor even in the Temple in Jerusalem either. It is spiritual and doesn't belong to this world; it is in the Kingdom of God.

Now let us combine all the points above so that we can have a better understanding:

- The Lord Jesus Christ is the foundation stone of the spiritual temple of God.
- Christians form the spiritual temple of God.

- The spiritual temple of God is the church; it is not this building or that building, nor the Temple in Jerusalem; it is in the Kingdom of God.

Our responsibilities

What then shall we do as the spiritual temple of God? What are our responsibilities?

1. We have to separate ourselves from the world

^{NAS} **2 Corinthians 6:15 – 18** Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? ¹⁶ Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, “I will dwell in them and walk among them; And I will be their God, and they shall be My people.” ¹⁷ Therefore, come out from their midst and be separate,” says the Lord. “And do not touch what is unclean; And I will welcome you. ¹⁸ And I will be a father to you, And you shall be sons and daughters to Me,” Says the Lord Almighty. (2Co 6:15-18 NAS)

The original Hebrew word for “Belial” is “בְּלִיַּעַל” (Bəliyya‘al) which means worthlessness. It is a designation of the devil, who is called by the name Satan. This passage, 2 Corinthians 6:15 – 18, says that there is no harmony between Jesus Christ and Satan, and there is no common ground between the believer and the unbeliever, just as there is no agreement between the temple of God and idols. Christians are the living stones of the spiritual temple of God, therefore we have to separate ourselves from the world. Then Yahweh God will accept us. He will be our Father and we will be His sons and daughters.

To separate ourselves from the world doesn’t mean that we stay away from sinners. The Lord Jesus never stays away from sinners; on the contrary he loves sinners and wants to save them. To separate ourselves from the world means that we live a righteous life that is entirely different from the sinful life of the world. (Please refer to my previous sermon “Saints” to understand the meaning of holy, to be separated from the world).

Christians are living stones for building up the spiritual temple of God. Our first responsibility is to live a righteous life, to be entirely different from the sinful life of the world.

2. We have to grow up

Anything that has life can grow. Human beings can grow, animals can grow, plants can grow. Similarly, living stones have life, therefore they can grow. Of course we are not talking about growing bigger and bigger in physical size, but about spiritual growth.

Verse 5 of the passage in 1 Peter says "...⁵ you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house..." We are being built up as a spiritual house. Who builds us up? It is Yahweh God who builds us up; we are not building up ourselves. Indeed we don't have the ability to build up ourselves, for it takes the power of Yahweh God working in our lives to build us up. Yet we have to co-operate with His power. If we don't co-operate with God's power, we won't grow properly. It is similar to the situation of parents who provide everything for their son: they feed him with nutritious food, they teach him how to behave and how to relate to other people, they enroll him in school. But if the son doesn't obey his parents, if he doesn't want to study but only wants to play computer games or hang out with his friends, he won't become a useful person in society.

Growth isn't automatic, for the new born baby has to drink milk. And when he grows bigger, he has to eat solid food, he has to learn to walk, to talk. Then he goes to school and learns to read and write. He also has to do exercises to build up his body, etc. Then he will grow up to become a healthy and well educated person. By contrast, if the baby doesn't eat he will die; if he doesn't study, he won't gain knowledge; if he doesn't exercise, he won't have a healthy body.

It is the same with our spiritual lives: we have to eat, study and do exercises. Each one of us is a member of the church that is being built up. If we are weak, the church would also be weak; if we are strong, the church would be strong and would manifest the glory of Yahweh God to the world. Therefore it is our responsibility to grow up spiritually.

What then is our spiritual food?

^{NAS} **Matthew 4:4** But He answered and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.'" (Mat 4:4 NAS)

Here the Lord Jesus says we should care not only about bread. Physical bread is necessary for this body, but our spiritual lives are more important than this body. Our bodies can survive on food, but our spiritual lives will survive because of the words from the mouth of God.

^{NAU} **1 Peter 2:2** like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, (1Pe 2:2 NAU)

This passage says that the word of God is the pure milk; Christians have to drink this pure milk in order to grow up in salvation. Please take notice here it says: "so that by it you may grow in

respect to salvation.” If we want to have salvation, we have to grow up; it is not that we simply believe in Jesus and we have salvation.

Through these two passages we see that the word of God is the spiritual food for our spiritual lives. But after we take in the food, it needs to be digested in order for it to become nourishment for our body. When it comes to spiritual food, we also need to digest it; how can we digest the spiritual food?

^{NAU} **John 4:34** Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work.” (Joh 4:34 NAU)

Here the Lord Jesus says that doing the will of Yahweh God and accomplishing His work, that for him is his spiritual food. After we study the word of God, we get to know God’s will, then we need to do His will; that is how we digest the spiritual food.

^{NAU} **Hebrews 5:14** But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.

Solid food refers to the more difficult teaching, which is more difficult to comprehend and more difficult to put into practice. This kind of solid food is for mature Christians; it doesn’t mean that they are necessarily older or have been Christians for a long time, but that they are more mature spiritually and are closer to God. Because they put the word of God into practice, as a result they grow up spiritually, and can discern good and evil.

3. Christians have to unite as one

The third point is that Christians have to unite as one. Why? Why is the unity so important?

^{ESV} **John 17:20 – 23** “I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word,²¹ that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.²² The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one,²³ I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.” (Joh 17:20 – 23 ESV)

This is the prayer of the Lord Jesus to His Father Yahweh God shortly before he was arrested. He asked the Father to help all his disciples be united as one just as the Father is in the Lord, and the Lord is in the Father, and we are in them. Here in this passage the Lord Jesus twice mentions

that if all the disciples are united as one, then the world will truly believe that God has sent him. The first time we see this statement is in v.21, “that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me;” The second time is in v.23, “I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.”

How can we convince the world to believe that the Lord Jesus is truly sent by God? Not by our knowledge, nor by our eloquence in speech, but by the unity among the Christians. Then the world will believe that the Lord Jesus is truly sent by God.

4. To always do the things pleasing to Yahweh God

Do you want to be with Yahweh God? I very much want to be with Yahweh God; what must we do in order to be with God?

^{ESV} **John 8:29** And he who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to him." (Joh 8:29 ESV)

Here the Lord Jesus says that He who sent him is with him; it is Yahweh God who has sent him, that means Yahweh God is with the Lord Jesus. Why? Because the Lord Jesus always does the things that are pleasing to God. If you want Yahweh God to be with you, you will likewise always do the things pleasing to Him, then He would be with you.

Conclusion

Now let's sum up everything. Today we have studied the title “Living stones”. The Lord Jesus is the foundation stone; at the same time, Christians are the living stones of the spiritual temple of God. Our responsibilities are:

- We have to separate ourselves from the world; it means that we live a holy life completely different from the sinful life of the world.
- We have to grow up. The more we grow up, the more the church can manifest the glory of God.
- We have to unite as one. Then the world will believe that the Lord Jesus is truly sent by God when they see the unity of the Christians.
- We always do the things pleasing to Yahweh God, then He would be with us.