



## **LESSON SEVEN**

### Growth in Life and Its Issues

Scripture Reading:

**1 Peter 2:1-10**

- 2:1** Therefore putting away all malice and all guile and hypocrisies and envyings and all evil speakings,
- 2:2** As newborn babes, long for the guileless milk of the word in order that by it you may grow unto salvation,
- 2:3** If you have tasted that the Lord is good.
- 2:4** Coming to Him, a living stone, rejected by men but with God chosen and precious,
- 2:5** You yourselves also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house into a holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.
- 2:6** For it is contained in Scripture: "Behold, I lay in Zion a cornerstone, chosen and precious; and he who believes on Him shall by no means be put to shame."
- 2:7** To you therefore who believe is the preciousness; but to the unbelieving, "The stone which the builders rejected, this has become the head of the corner,"
- 2:8** And, "A stone of stumbling and a rock of offense"; who stumble at the word, being disobedient, to which also they were appointed.
- 2:9** But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people acquired for a possession, so that you may tell out the virtues of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;
- 2:10** Who once were not a people but now are the people of God; who had not previously been shown mercy but have now been shown mercy.

## **QUESTIONS:**

### **Section 1:**

1. How does growing unto salvation in 1 Peter 2:2 involve the matter of transformation?
2. What is the basis for our growth in life? How does the guileless milk of the word operate based on this?

### **Section 2:**

1. What does it mean by “tasting that the Lord is good”? Do you have any experience related to this matter?
2. What is the significance of Christ being the living stone?

### **Section 3:**

1. What is the proof that God has chosen Christ to be the stone for His building?
2. How does Christ function as a stone? Can Christians also stumble at the word?
3. What does salvation in 1 Peter 2 indicate? What is the thought in Peter’s mind as he was writing this portion?

### **Section 4:**

1. Please explain how Peter obtained the concept of living stones from his experiences.
2. What is transformation? How can we be transformed in our experience?

## **GROWING UNTO SALVATION**

According to Peter's word in 2:2, by the pure milk of the word we may grow unto salvation. The Greek word rendered "unto" also means resulting in. To grow in life results in salvation. Salvation here, as the result of growth in life, is not initial salvation. God's full and complete salvation has a long span—from regeneration, including justification, to glorification (Rom. 8:30). At regeneration we received initial salvation. Then we need to grow by feeding on Christ as the nourishing milk in the word of God unto full salvation, unto maturity for glorification. This will be the salvation of our soul, which will be revealed to us at the unveiling of the Lord Jesus (1:5, 9-10, 13). However, according to the context, "unto salvation" here refers directly to "being built up a spiritual house, into a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices" in verse 5, and to telling out "the virtues of Him" in verse 9.

If we grow unto salvation, we shall experience salvation from malice, guile, hypocrisies, envyings, and evil speakings, the five negative things spoken of in verse 1. To be saved from malice, guile, hypocrisies, envyings, and evil speakings is not accomplished by effort of our own. This cannot be done by self-improvement, adjustment, or correction. On the contrary, to be saved from these negative things is an inward matter.

Fifty years ago, it was difficult for me to overcome my temper. But now after more than fifty years' experience with the Lord, I can testify that it is difficult for me to lose my temper... A person's temper usually increases with age. For this reason, older people are often critical of others and impatient with them. Naturally speaking, the older we get, the more of a problem we shall have with our temper. In the Lord and before the Lord I can testify that the older I get, the less temper I have. The reason for this change is that over the years I have experienced growth in life unto salvation from my temper. This is an illustration of the fact that, in a practical way, we all need to grow unto salvation.

The salvation in verse 2 is salvation in the progressing stage, in the stage of transformation. Regeneration is in the stage of initial salvation;

transformation, in the stage of progressing salvation; and glorification, in the stage of consummation. We are not in the initial stage or in the stage of completion. We are in the progressing stage of salvation; that is, we are in the stage of transformation.

Transformation is different from a mere change. Transformation involves a change from one form into another form. However, it involves an inward change in nature or constitution, not simply an outward change in form. For example, suppose a person is ill, and his complexion does not look healthy. He may try to improve his appearance by putting some kind of coloring on his face. I do not like that kind of skin coloring, for it makes me think of the work of a mortician, who tries to make the face of a dead person appear as attractive as possible. Such an outward change is altogether different from living, inward transformation.

Peter charges us to long for the guileless milk of the word that by it we may grow unto transformation. We do not grow unto outward correction or outward adjustment or outward improvement. On the contrary, we grow unto inward transformation by life and in life.

## **THE BASIS OF ALL SPIRITUAL GROWTH**

Nourishing food will cause transformation only when it is given to something living and organic. If you try to give nourishment to something lifeless and inorganic, that thing would become corrupt and unclean. It is impossible for something lifeless to receive help from nourishing food. Without life, there would not be anything in us to cooperate with this nourishment.

Peter begins 2:2 with the words "As newborn babes." The word "newborn" indicates a living organism. A newborn babe is living and organic. As such newborn babes, we need to drink the guileless milk of the word. Then the milk will afford us living, organic nourishment. Spontaneously the life within us will work together with the nourishment of the milk so that we may grow. However, if we did not have a living, organic element in us through regeneration, the nourishment in the milk of the word would not have any effect, for there would not be any cooperation on our part.

In 1:23 Peter says that we have been regenerated. In 2:2 he urges us to be as newborn babes longing for milk. Both regeneration in 1:23 and the newborn babes in 2:2 point to the same matter—regeneration with the divine life. This regeneration is the base for our growth in life and for the purification of our inner being. We all have within us the divine life that we received in regeneration as the basis of all spiritual growth. In order to grow and be purified, we must have this base. Therefore, as newborn babes, we should long for the guileless milk of the word so that by it we may grow unto transformation.

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### **TASTING THAT THE LORD IS GOOD**

In verse 3 Peter continues, “If you have tasted that the Lord is good.” The Lord can be tasted, and His taste is pleasant and good. If we have tasted Him, we shall long for the nourishing milk in His word. The Greek word rendered “good” in this verse also means pleasant, kind.

It was certain that the believers were newborn babes, but as verse 3 indicates, some of them may not have tasted that the Lord is good. Today millions of believers have truly been regenerated, but a great many have never tasted that the Lord is good.

Let us use an example to show how someone may be regenerated and yet not have tasted that the Lord is good. A middle-aged lady had been saved for two years. She had been redeemed and regenerated. After visiting our meetings a few times, one day she stood up to give a testimony. She said that her husband had lost his job, and they were unable to pay the rent. Furthermore, their son was sick. She went on to say that she prayed to the Lord about the situation... she said, “How good the Lord is to me! He is real, living, and good. We prayed, and He gave us a better job and a better house, and He healed our son. Hallelujah! The Lord is good.” But although she spoke of the Lord’s goodness, this is not the testimony of tasting that the Lord is good.

What, then, would be a genuine testimony of tasting the Lord? Suppose the same sister testified something like this: “My husband has lost his job, we have lost our dwelling place, and our son is ill. The more we pray, the more trouble we seem to have. But, brothers and sisters, I can testify that the more difficult our situation is, the

happier I am inwardly. Oh, how I enjoy the Lord! I have experienced a little of what Paul experienced when he asked the Lord to take away the thorn and the Lord refused, saying that His grace was sufficient for Paul. The Lord caused Paul to enjoy His grace. He put him into a particular environment so that he would have to enjoy grace. He did not take away the thorn. On the one hand, Paul suffered the thorn. But on the other hand, he was experiencing the Lord’s sustaining grace. In our case, it has been several months, and still the Lord has not done anything for us outwardly. But I can testify that I have been enjoying Him as my grace. When my mother learned of our situation, she said, ‘What is this? Where is your Jesus? Is He real and living? Why wouldn’t He do anything for you?’ But no matter what she says to me, I keep on enjoying the Lord’s grace.” This is a testimony of tasting the Lord.

The tasting of the Lord is not in outward miracles. Rather, it is in the inward nourishment of life. No matter what kind of environment we may be in or what kind of circumstances we may have, we are sustained by the Lord. We can say with Paul, “I can do all things in Him who empowers me” (Phil. 4:13). We can stand the test of both riches and poverty, of both pleasant circumstances and difficult, because we do not care for the outward situation but for the inward nourishment. This inward nourishment is the genuine tasting of the Lord. In these verses Peter indicates that if we have tasted that the Lord is good, we shall surely long for the milk in the word.

### **THE LIVING STONE FOR GOD’S BUILDING**

In verse 4 Peter goes on to speak of Christ as a living stone: “To whom coming, a living stone, having been rejected by men, but with God chosen, held in honor.” The Greek word rendered “coming” can also be translated approaching, drawing near, coming forward.

A living stone is one that not only possesses life, but also grows in life. This is Christ for God’s building. Here Peter changes his metaphor from the seed of the vegetable life (1:23-24) to the stone of minerals. The seed is for life-planting; the stone is for building (2:5). Peter’s thought has gone on from life-planting to God’s building. As life to us, Christ is the seed. For God’s building, He is the stone. After receiving Him as the seed

of life, we need to grow that we may experience Him as the stone living in us. Thus He will make us also living stones, transformed with His stone nature so that we may be built together with others a spiritual house upon Him as both the foundation and the cornerstone (Isa. 28:16).

In 2:7 Peter continues, "To you therefore who believe is the preciousness; but to the unbelieving, A stone which the builders rejected, this became the head of the corner." In Greek the word for "preciousness" is a kindred word to honor in verses 4 and 6. The very Christ chosen by God as a stone, even a cornerstone held in honor, is the preciousness to His believers. But to the unbelieving He is a rejected, despised stone.

Verse 8 says, "And, A stone of stumbling and a rock of offense; who stumble at the word, being disobedient, to which also they were appointed." This verse reveals that the reliable Christ (v. 6), being rejected, became a stumbling stone, at which the rejecting Judaizers stumbled (Matt. 21:44). The relative pronoun "which" refers to the Jews' disobedience with the result of stumbling.

### **EXPERIENCING CHRIST AS THE MILK AND THE STONE**

According to verse 4, we need to come to Christ as the living stone. But what is the way to come to Him? We come to the Lord by drinking the milk of the word. Have you ever realized that when you are drinking milk from the word, that is your coming to the Lord? What is the milk in the word? That milk is the Lord Himself. Therefore, when we drink the milk, we come to the Lord. Do you have some other way of coming to the food you eat? What is your way of coming to the food? Do you not come to it by eating it? We all come to the food by eating it. The same is true with respect to coming to Christ as the living stone. In verse 4 the word "coming" is equal to drinking. Therefore, when we drink the milk, we come to the Lord.

We need more experience of Christ as the milk and the stone. In the morning we should drink Christ as milk from the Word. Then during the day the process of transformation should take place within us. In the evening we should come to the church meetings and fellowship with the saints. This is building. Here we see that in the morning Christ is milk, and in the evening He

becomes the stone. During the day the milk does a transforming work within us to produce a stone.

First the Lord is milk to nourish us. Through the nourishment in the milk of the word, transformation takes place. Then we have the building, where the Lord Himself is the stone. This is the reason that in chapter two we first have the milk and then the stone.

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### **CHRIST CHOSEN BY GOD**

First Peter 2:6, quoting Isaiah 28:16, says, "Because it is contained in Scripture: Behold, I lay in Zion a chosen stone, a cornerstone held in honor, and he who believes on Him shall by no means be put to shame." Although this living stone was rejected by the leaders of God's people, this stone was chosen by God. God's choosing of Christ as the living stone is of two aspects. First, as we have seen, Christ was chosen by God in eternity past. That was God's initial choosing of Him. Then God chose Christ the second time in resurrection. Resurrection is a strong proof that God has chosen Christ. This second choosing was a confirmation of God's first choosing. Therefore, in resurrection God confirmed the choice He had made concerning Christ in eternity past.

When Christ was on the cross, apparently He was rejected by God. To the Pharisees and to all the others who opposed Him, the crucifixion of Christ was a sign that God had rejected Him. According to Matthew 27:42 and 43, the chief priests, with the scribes and the elders, said, "He is king of Israel, let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe on him. He trusted upon God; let Him rescue him now if He wants him; for he said, I am God's Son." Luke 23:35 says, "And the rulers were even sneering and saying, He saved others, let him save himself if this is the Christ of God, the Chosen One!" The religious leaders thought that God had rejected Christ. However, on the third day Christ was resurrected, and that resurrection was a sign of God's choosing, a proof that God had chosen Christ to be the stone for His building.

These two acts, resurrection and ascension, prove and confirm that Jesus of Nazareth is the One whom God has chosen to be the head of the corner for God's building.

As such a chosen One, Christ is now held in honor. Christ is not only in glory; He is also on the throne at the right hand of God. This means that He is in a position of honor. Because Christ is now in such an honorable position, He is precious, highly valued.

### **THE REJECTED STONE BECOMING THE HEAD OF THE CORNER**

In verse 7 Peter goes on to say, “To you therefore who believe is the preciousness; but to the unbelieving, A stone which the builders rejected, this became the head of the corner.” In Greek, the word rendered “preciousness” here is a kindred word to honor in verses 4 and 6. The very Christ chosen by God as a stone, even a cornerstone held in honor, is the preciousness to His believers. But to the unbelieving, He is a rejected, despised stone. Christ’s preciousness is not only a matter of condition, but also a matter of His position. For Him to be precious means that He is held in honor, that He occupies an honorable position.

In this verse we are told that the builders rejected Christ as the living stone. These builders were the Jewish leaders in Judaism, who were supposed to build the house of God. They rejected Christ to the uttermost, as the Lord had predicted (Matt. 21:38-42). Nevertheless, Christ became the head of the corner in resurrection. As we have seen, in his early preaching Peter declared this fact to the Jews.

To the unbelieving, Christ is a stone rejected by the builders. Nevertheless, this rejected stone has become the head of the corner. Hence, Christ is a stone of two aspects. With Him as the stone for God’s building, there is the aspect of honor and also the aspect of rejection. On the one hand, Christ was rejected; on the other hand, He has been honored. He was rejected by the Jewish builders, but He has been honored by God. How do we know that Christ was rejected by the Jewish leaders? We know it by the fact that they put Christ on the cross. That was their rejection of Him. How do we know that Christ has been honored by God? We know this by the fact that God resurrected Him and exalted Him. Therefore, the resurrection and exaltation of Christ are strong signs both that God has chosen Him and that He is held in honor by God.

### **A STONE OF STUMBLING AND A ROCK OF OFFENSE**

In verse 8 Peter continues, “And, A stone of stumbling and a rock of offense; who stumble at the word, being disobedient, to which also they were appointed.” Christ is not only a rejected stone and a stone held in honor; He is also a stumbling stone and a rock of offense. The reliable Christ, being rejected, became a stumbling stone, at which the rejecting Judaizers stumbled (Matt. 21:44a). As the stone, Christ functions in both a positive way and a negative way. For us, He is the cornerstone positively, but for the unbelieving Jews, He is a stumbling stone and a rock of offense.

### **THOSE WHO STUMBLE AT THE WORD**

In verse 8 Peter speaks of those “who stumble at the word, being disobedient, to which also they were appointed.” What is the antecedent of the relative pronoun “who”? Actually, there is not a clear antecedent expressed. However, we may say that the antecedent is implied. Peter’s thought may be that “who stumble at the word” may refer to anyone or to everyone who stumbles. If we stumble at the word, then this “who” includes us. It refers to anyone throughout the generations who stumbles at the word.

Now we need to ask what is the word at which people may stumble. It certainly is not the word with the guileless milk mentioned in 2:2. On the contrary, it is the word quoted by Peter in verses 6 through 8, the word regarding a chosen stone, a cornerstone held in honor, being laid in Zion. It also refers to the word concerning the stone rejected by the builders that becomes the head of the corner (v. 7). Furthermore, it includes the word in verse 8 about this stone being a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense. This is the word at which people may stumble.

We should not think that it is impossible for Christians to stumble at the word. Many are the Christians who have stumbled at the word. They do not believe that the Lord Jesus can be so strict or straight. Sometimes we have spoken with certain believers regarding the matter of Christ being both the building stone and the stumbling stone. They have replied, “No, the Lord Jesus is merciful. He would never be a stone of stumbling or a rock of offense. The Lord has a broad heart; He is not narrow like you. You think that you are the only ones who are right. You are narrow, but

the Lord Jesus is not narrow.” However, if we are too broad, we shall not believe this word. We shall not believe that, on the one hand, Christ is the building stone and that, on the other hand, He is also the stumbling stone. Many Christians have stumbled at this strict word. The Jewish leaders have not been the only ones who have stumbled at it.

Have you ever thought that Christ could purposely be a rock of offense? We need to be careful concerning this and ask ourselves if we believe this word. If we do not believe it, then we stumble at this word. Then automatically the Lord will become a stumbling block to us. We stumble at such a word because, in our opinion, it is too narrow and strict.

### **GROWING UNTO SALVATION FOR THE BUILDING**

In this message we shall consider 2:5, 9 and 10. Verse 5 says, “You yourselves also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, into a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” In reading this verse we need to take care of grammar. Verse 4 is a modifier of the subject of the sentence in verse 5. The main part of the sentence in verse 5 is this: “You...are being built up a spiritual house.” Hence, the main thought here is that of the building. This thought continues the thought in verse 2 of growing unto salvation. This means that following salvation we have the building. Growing unto salvation is for the building. This indicates that here salvation involves not only transformation, but also includes being built up. As a totality, salvation in 1 Peter 2 indicates transformation for building up.

Praise the Lord that regeneration has made us newborn babes! As newborn babes, we all should long for the guileless milk of the word. Then by this milk we shall grow unto salvation. This salvation is transformation, and transformation is the building. Feeding on Christ by the nourishing milk in the Word of God is not only for growing in life; it is also for building up. Growing is for building up.

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### **TRANSFORMED INTO LIVING STONES**

In verse 5 Peter indicates that the believers are living stones. We, the believers in Christ, are living stones, like Christ, through regeneration and transformation. We were created of clay (Rom. 9:21). But at regeneration we received the seed of the divine life, which by its growth in us transforms us into living stones. At Peter’s conversion the Lord gave him a new name, Peter—a stone (John 1:42). When Peter received the revelation concerning Christ, the Lord revealed further that He also was the rock—a stone (Matt. 16:16-18). Peter was impressed by these two incidents that both Christ and His believers are stones for God’s building.

By our natural birth we are clay, not stones. Do you realize that you were made of clay? Genesis 2:7 says that man was made from the dust of the ground. Romans 9 reveals that we are vessels of clay. How, then, can we become stones? We become stones through the process of transformation.

When Peter first met the Lord Jesus, the Lord changed his name from Simon to Peter. Referring to the Lord Jesus and Peter, John 1:42 says, “Looking at him, Jesus said, You are Simon the son of John; you shall be called Cephas (which translated means a stone).” According to biblical principle, whatever the Lord speaks will be. Therefore, when the Lord called Peter a stone, that meant that he would certainly become a stone. Whatever the Lord says to us will be fulfilled. If He says, “You are gold,” then you will be golden. The Lord knew that when He changed Simon’s name to Peter, a stone, he would become a stone.

In John 1:42 Peter was told that he was a stone. Then sometime later, in Caesarea Philippi, in answer to the Lord’s question, “Who do you say that I am,” Peter, receiving the revelation from the Father, said, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” To this the Lord Jesus replied, “And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church...” (Matt. 16:18). Here the Lord indicates that He is the rock upon which the church is built and that Peter is a stone.

No doubt, these two incidents, the one recorded in John 1 and the other in Matthew 16, were deeply impressed into Peter’s being. He could

never forget those events. It must have been from these experiences that Peter obtained the concept of living stones for the building of the spiritual house, which is the church. When Peter wrote this portion of 1 Peter, he wrote it according to the impression these events made upon him.

First Peter 2:5 says that we, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house. However, we all are clay. How can we be built up? In order to be built up a spiritual house, we need to become stones. But how can we actually become living stones? We become living stones by coming to Christ as the living stone (v. 4).

We may use petrified wood as an illustration of transformation. In Arizona there is a place called the petrified forest, an area that contains much petrified wood. Petrified wood is wood that has been changed into stone. Over a long period of time, water has been flowing over wood and through it. By means of this flow of water, the substance of the wood is changed into stone. On the one hand, the element of wood is carried away; on the other hand, the element of stone is brought in to replace the element of wood. In this way the wood becomes stone.

The principle is the same with our experience of transformation. If we long for the milk of the word, this milk will be like a current of living water flowing within us. As we stay in this flow, the current will carry away our natural substance and replace it with heavenly, divine minerals. These minerals are actually Christ. Gradually, over a period of time, we shall be transformed or “petrified”; that is, we shall become precious stones.

If we would be transformed, every day we need to come to the Lord as milk. We have pointed out that the way to come to Christ as the living stone is to drink the guileless milk of the word. This means that we come to Christ by drinking Him. As we daily drink in the milk of the word, we shall be transformed.

Transformation cannot take place overnight. The petrified wood in Arizona required a very long time to be changed from wood into stone. If the petrified wood could speak, it might say, “It has taken me a long time of being in the current of water to be transformed from mere wood into petrified wood.” As one who has been in the Lord for more than fifty years, I can testify that

transformation takes time. I assure you that you cannot be transformed in a few months or even in a few years.

When some hear a word concerning how long transformation takes, they may say, “I can’t wait so long. I quit.” Actually, this is not up to you, for it is your destiny to be transformed. Wood that is in the process of being petrified cannot stop the process. It is the destiny of this wood to be changed into petrified wood. We need to remember that, according to chapter one of 1 Peter, we were chosen according to the foreknowledge of God before the foundation of the world. God has chosen us. Also, in our experience, we have been “caught” by Him, and we cannot escape, no matter how hard we may try. Therefore, instead of trying to escape, we should simply rest in the flow of living water and allow this water to pass through us so that we may be transformed.

According to 2:5, as living stones we are being built up as a spiritual house. Although the nourishing milk of the word is for the soul through the mind, it eventually nourishes our spirit. Instead of making us soulish, it makes us spiritual, suitable for building up a spiritual house for God.

God’s goal in the believers is to have a house built up with living stones. He does not want separated and scattered stones, nor even a pile of stones merely gathered together. He wants stones built up with one another.

The spiritual house into which we are being built is God’s building. Eventually, this building will consummate in the New Jerusalem. In the New Jerusalem there will not be any clay, for all the clay will have been transformed into precious stone. This means that the New Jerusalem is built with precious stones. We are becoming the precious stones that will be built up into the New Jerusalem. Hallelujah, the building work is now going on! How is this work going on? It is being carried out by the process of petrification, transformation. This happens as we daily, even hourly, come to Christ as milk and drink Him in. Then we shall have the flow, the current, that transforms us from clay into stone for God’s building.