

# Do Not Be Surprised at the Fiery Ordeal Among You

## An Expositional Journey Through **1Peter** **1Peter 2:2-5**

### 15- Becoming a Living Stone and a Spiritual House by Tasting the Kindness of the Rejected Living Stone- Part 1

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April 15, 2018

#### **1 Peter 2:2-5**

**2** like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation,

**3** if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord.

**4** 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.

To the Glory of God

Now this morning, we are *rejoining* our verse-by-verse "journey" through the Epistle of **1 Peter**. And it is really *providential* that we find ourselves at this particular Passage because the people of the Covenant of Peace Church are engaged in a life-long quest to pursue biblical Holiness on purpose. And this particular Passage deals with what that looks like in our lives.

And to begin with, I want you to see several words and phrases that the Apostle Peter was "moved along" by God the Holy Spirit to use in this Passage:

Verse 2: **so that by it** (the pure milk of the Word) **you may grow in respect to salvation,**

Verse 5a: **you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood**

Verse 5b: **to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.**

... so, we are told to:

1. Grow
2. Be Built Up
3. Offer Up

... and we accomplish these three things, by obeying three other Commands:

Verse 2: **like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word...**

Verse 3: **if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord**

Verse 4: **Come to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God**

... so,

1. Long
2. Taste
3. Come

... so,

The "Longing" corresponds to the "Growing"

The "Tasting" corresponds to the "Being Built Up"

The "Coming" corresponds to the "Offering Up"

Now to get the full meaning of what Peter is talking about here in this Passage is going to take several visits. I simply cannot do this Passage justice in one Sermon. So, let's begin by stating the obvious: Peter is writing this Epistle to people, who are already saved, who are, at that very moment, suffering *unthinkable* persecution at the hands of the vicious, pagan Roman Emperor, Nero, at about the last third of the

1<sup>st</sup> Century. Back in verse 1, of Chapter 1, Peter calls his immediate audience:

“Scattered Aliens”

... and we studied that, while it was the evil Nero, who had made these believers to be “scattered”, it was God Who had made them to be “aliens”. Peter described them this way:

### **1 Peter 1:1b&2a**

**... who are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood:**

So, it was the fact that God had sovereignly and graciously chosen these people, from before the foundation of the world to be saved, as to *why* they didn't “fit in” with the lost and unsaved people of their age, and were called “Aliens”. And as we studied, all genuinely born-again souls go through this “Divine Discomfort” or this “Holy Discontentment” of *not* “belonging” to this present, evil world.

So, by virtue of our Salvation, we are “different” or “set apart” from those who are yet in their sins and headed for the Wrath of God. Now we are certainly not “better” than the others, but we don't “act” like them, we don't “talk” like them, we don't “think” like them, we don't “see the world” like them, and we don't “live our lives” like those who know not Christ.

And this is a normal and natural *result* of being redeemed. All believers now see “all of life” through the *prism* of Scripture, and the result is we seek to live our lives, with abandoned, to the Glory of God. So, we live “counter-intuitively” to the way that the unregenerate live. And this distinct way of living is called “Holiness”. And it is the Goal of every truly saved person. Those who seek to be holy are simply yielding themselves to the leading of God the Holy Spirit, Who now lives and abides within them.

And those who do not seek to be holy are not saved and are not born-again, and are only deceived about their supposed conversion. Here is how the writer of **Hebrews** illustrated how important “being holy” is to a genuine believer:

## Hebrews 12:14

**Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord.**

... where the word “**sanctification**” here comes from the Greek word that means: *to be holy*.

So, all of the verses and passages in the Bible that have to do with what God, in Christ, has sovereignly done for us is teaching us how lost people are saved. And all those verses and passages about what we are to “do” and how we are to “live our lives” and how we are to “view the world” and the “things in this life” are teaching us how we are to live *after* we are saved.

And the struggle against the lusts of our flesh, by the Power of the Holy Spirit, to be found humbly and joyfully obedient to those verses and passages, all to the Glory of God, is called “The Process of Progressive Sanctification”. And Sanctification begins *after* we have been born again by a sovereign Act of God, and *after* we have repented of sin and trusted in Christ and in His finished Work, and *after* we have been made Righteous by imputation, and *after* we have been adopted into the Family of God and extends all throughout our lives, all the way to the point of our deaths. So, Sanctification comprises the *majority* of our lives and consumes the *majority* of our prayers and the *majority* of our efforts and the *majority* of our time.

Sanctification is the *process*, initiated and carried out by God the Holy Spirit, where we are being molded and shaped and formed into the Image and Likeness of Jesus Christ. It is where our ever-growing understanding of God’s Word, in conjunction with the ever-growing empowerment and leadership of the Holy Spirit comes together in us to unveil our eyes so that we may behold the Glory of God in the Face of Jesus Christ, and be changed into that same Image.

And the result of “seeing Jesus” in all His magnificence is that humble and joyful obedience to Him is developed and made real. So, our obedience to Jesus, our bearing of the Fruit of the Spirit, our pursuit of Holiness is the outward and tangible and visible manifestation of the inward Work of Sanctification that is going on in our lives.

But we must be careful that what we understand about Sanctification is what Peter is teaching here. Peter did *not* believe and he does *not* teach that we simply need to obey the Bible. To command saved people to obey the Bible is like telling lost people to be saved and quit sinning. That format creates *nothing* but self-righteous Pharisees because it leaves off the very *essence* of the Command: *How? How* do saved people obey the Bible? *How* are lost people saved and quit sinning?

Are we to assume that lost people are drawn to Salvation in Christ by Grace alone, but once we are saved we are to exercise human choice and are sanctified as a result of our efforts? And, if so, if we are sanctified because we "put forth the required effort" or because we "tried harder" or because we "made up our minds", then would we not then be *entitled* to the Glory? If Grace is only for lost people to become saved in the first place, why is there so much written in the New Testament about Grace at work in the life of believers?

I think that we have been sold a bill of goods about Sanctification by many of those in the modern church, just like they sold us about Salvation. I think that much of the teaching today, about both Salvation and Sanctification, is many times, just flat out wrong. But even when it is right, it is usually *woefully* inadequate to cause us to really understand and appreciate what is actually going on.

For example, in the Passage that Brother Vern just read to us, the Apostle Peter *prefaced* our Sanctification with three words that might surprise you:

1. Longing
2. Tasting
3. Coming

Verse 2: **like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word...**

Verse 3: **if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord**

Verse 4: **coming to Him as to a living stone**

So, the *first* Apostolic Command is not to *obey* the Bible, but to *long* for the Bible. To *desire* the Bible. To *crave* the pure milk of the Word. Then at the *end* of verse 2, Peter says what will be the result of *longing* for the pure milk of the Word of God:

**... so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation,**

So, "spiritual growth" or "Holiness" or "Sanctification", or "bearing godly fruit", is the *result* of obeying the Command to *long* for the pure milk of the Word. So, the "growth in respect to Salvation" doesn't come first. The "Holiness" doesn't come first. The "Sanctification" doesn't come first. The "bearing of godly fruit" doesn't come first. The "longing" comes first. But wait! There is another caveat:

**... if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord**

So, even *after* you have obeyed the Command to "long for the sincere milk of the Word", this Command is only active in your life if you have already "tasted the Kindness of the Lord". And, after that, you will enjoy Holiness and Sanctification and godly fruit and spiritual growth.

But wait! There is one more admonition. Peter then tells all of us to not stay where we are, but to "come". But where should we come? We should come to Jesus, whom Peter describes as being:

**... a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God**

So, Peter doesn't merely tell us to "*Come to Jesus*". He tells us to come to Jesus, as a living Stone, Who has been rejected by men, but Who is also Choice and Precious in the Sight of God. So, we come to the:

- ✓ Dead and Living Stone
- ✓ Rejected and Choice Stone
- ✓ Rejected and Precious Stone

... and so here, Peter is telling us how we are to see Jesus. And this is where I think many in the modern Church have completely missed the mark. Growing in God, or striving for Holiness or pursuing Sanctification or bearing godly fruit, are not merely "acts of your will". These are not "works" that you are to perform. Growing in God,

striving for Holiness, pursuing Sanctification, or bearing godly fruit are simply different ways of understanding what happens to believers who “Long” and who “Taste” and who “Come”. They are the normal and natural *results* of “*desiring* God’s Word” and “*savoring* Christ’s Kindness” and of being drawn to Jesus.

Now before you begin to object to this by saying, “*My life is already very full. And I don’t need some other Command that I have to try to put forth more effort to obey,*” I want you to remember who Peter’s immediate audience was when he physically wrote these words down. Peter was writing to people who had lost everything they owned. They were being scattered all over the face of the earth because the Emperor Nero had taken it upon himself to be used by satan to enact horrendous persecution to these saints.

And as you try to remember this, ask yourself the question, “*Is this how you talk to people, who are enduring terrible persecution?*” And the answer is that most of us would never speak in a manner like this to those who were already under such a heavy load. We would talk about things like how to get food and how to acquire shelter and how to treat the sick, which are the basic fundamentals of life on earth.

And yet, God the Holy Spirit moved upon this amazing Apostle to inspire him to talk to these persecuted followers about very deep and profound spiritual Truths so that they would be reminded what their trouble was all really about, and *why* they were going through this hard time, so they would remain faithful, even to the point of death. And *evidently*, that is infinitely more important to God than what would be on the top of our list.

Now, unlike us, the men that God used to bring about the Protestant Reformation seemed to understand what Peter is talking about here. And they *encapsulated* what Peter teaches here about longing and tasting in one simple phrase:

“Union with Christ”

... and they developed a Latin phrase that summarized this amazing and ongoing process of already saved people longing for the sincere milk of the Word, and of continually tasting the Kindness of the Lord that would result in their “growth with respect to Salvation”. And that Latin phrase was:

## *Solus Christus* (by Christ alone)

So, the Reformers taught that we are not only saved by what Christ alone did, but we are also “made holy” by two things:

1. Who Jesus is
2. What Jesus has already done (and is continually doing)

So, the Reformers taught the people to look to Jesus, personally, and to use the various “Means of Grace” that God has made available to them so that they would develop a very *close* and a very *intimate* and very *real* relationship with the Lord Christ Himself. In other words, the Reformers taught that the “experience” of *longing* for the Word of God and the “experience” of *tasting* the Kindness of the Lord and the “experience” of *coming* to Jesus, or of *drawing close* to Jesus, would produce this “Union with Christ”. And it was this real and close and intimate Union that would result in the Holiness and the Obedience.

So, for example, partaking of the Lord’s Table is about Jesus, *not* merely the ceremony. The humility and obedience of Baptism is about Jesus, *not* the water. The discipline of reading and studying God’s Word is about Jesus, *not* merely about gaining knowledge. The privilege of Prayer is about Jesus, *not* about delivering your list of wants and demands. And the beauty of Godly Fellowship is about Jesus, *not* merely about developing closer friendships.

All of these various “Means of Grace” are designed to relieve us of the dead, dry, rote slavery of human effort as they reveal to us, all over again, the Glory of the risen Lamb. And with the Grace they provide, average, everyday believers can develop a much deeper “hunger and thirst” for Righteousness, a very powerful “panting” for God, similar to how the deer pants for the water-brooks, and a unquenchable craving to taste the Kindness of the Lord. And this is why, 1,000 years before Peter wrote this, King David said:

### **Psalms 34:8**

**O taste and see that the Lord is good; How blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him!**



... and about the same time that Peter wrote this, God the Holy Spirit was moving on the writer of the **Epistle to the Hebrews** to tell us:

**Hebrews 10:22**

**Let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled *clean* from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.**

... so, unlike the man-made religions of the world, Christianity encourages us to not only *objectively* "believe and know" Who Jesus is, based on the historical facts laid out in Scripture, but to also *subjectively* "experience" Him in the reality of our lives. And whereas, it is terribly inadequate and unbiblical to limit yourself to *only* the subjective experience, it is also just as inadequate and just as unbiblical to limit yourself to merely the objective facts of Scripture. The Bible teaches both, to God's Glory and our Good. No wonder the Roman religious organization rebelled against this concept back in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century.

Now, in a day when the visible Church teaches strange sounding things like, "*Exercise your Faith, so we may receive great things from God*", the Apostle Peter taught that we are to "*long and taste, so that we may be holy*". And the Reformers taught that we accomplish those two aspects by our "Union with Christ". Jesus Himself taught this by using the term "abiding" in **John 15:4-11**:

**4 "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither *can* you unless you abide in Me.**

**5 "I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.**

**6 "If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned.**

**7 "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.**

**8 "My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and *so* prove to be My disciples.**

**9 "Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love.**

**10 "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love.**

**11 "These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and *that* your joy may be made full.**

Now the word “**abide**”, as used by Jesus herem has to do with us *remaining* with Jesus, *staying* with Jesus, and *dwelling continually* with Jesus, which is simply another way of looking at this “Union with Jesus”. So, just how does all this work? Look again at what Jesus taught here. Our Lord said that the Goal of Salvation was for us to “bear fruit”. And as we have already discovered, “Bearing Fruit” is synonymous with “Serving God” or “Sanctification” or “Holiness” or “Following Jesus”, or, in the words of Peter:

### **Grow[ing] in respect to salvation**

And the Bible clearly and repeatedly teaches that two things will be true as we bear fruit or grow with respect to Salvation:

1. God will be glorified
2. We will *prove* that our Salvation is real

... look again at Verse 8:

**My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and *so* prove to be My disciples**

... yet we are *not* told by Jesus to simply “go forth and bear fruit”. We are told to “abide”.

Verse 4: **Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither *can* you unless you abide in Me**

Verse 5: **he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing**

Verse 6: **If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned.**

Verse 7: **If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you**

Jesus said *repeatedly* that "abiding in Him" was the *pathway* to us bearing fruit. So, bearing fruit is not the Cause of our Sanctification or our growing in Salvation, but rather the unmistakable proof that we belong to Jesus and are abiding in Him. And that tells us that "bearing godly fruit" or being Sanctified" or "following Jesus" is the normal and natural *result* of abiding in the Vine, Jesus Christ. Or in the words of the Apostle Peter, "growing in respect to Salvation" is the *result* of "longing for the Word of Christ and tasting the Kindness of Christ and of being drawn near to Christ". And that is what the Reformers meant when they talked about genuine believers possessing a "Union with Christ".

And then Jesus gave us an example of what He was talking about:

**9 "Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love.**

**10 "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love.**

Now right about now, some of you are getting that sinking feeling again that unless you "do" what Jesus says here and "keep My Commandments", you're *never* going to experience godly fruit bearing. And this is the area where we all find ourselves at a loss. Because all that this does to many is to exhaust them with endless guilt at falling short of "keeping God's Commandments". *"Brother Blair, I understand that if I keep God's Commandments, then I will bear godly fruit. But that's the problem! I don't always keep God's Commandments. I always fall short! I always fail! So, I'm doomed to never enjoy my Sanctification."*

But the "Commandments" that Jesus is talking about us keeping here is *not* obedience to the *Ten Commandments*. And we know that because obedience to the Ten Commandments is the definition of "sinless perfection", and no human, born of woman, besides Jesus has ever or will ever accomplish that. No, Jesus is talking about the Command for us "to abide". He is talking about the Commandments for us "to long and to taste and to come".

And "longing and tasting and drawing near" are products of "seeing". And "seeing", having our eyes unveiled, so we may behold the Glory of God in the Face of Jesus Christ, is a Sovereign Work of God, and *not* something that we can initiate. So, the way we are to be

Sanctified, the highway to Holiness, the pathway to full and joyful Obedience, is not to try harder or to do more work. It is simply to behold Jesus! To see Him as glorious! To comprehend Jesus as the Treasure of the Universe! And Peter said that as we enjoy this precious and amazing Union with Jesus, we will be:

### **1 Peter 2:5b**

**... built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.**

Listen, if the New Covenant is nothing but a different set of rules that I am to struggle to obey, then I am no better off under the New than I was under the Old Covenant. The entire concept of *why* the New Covenant is *infinitely* superior to the Old is because the Old was a Covenant between God and Man. And so, we were to do "this", and then God would do "that". But if we didn't do "that", then God would damn us.

And the result of the Old Covenant was that every human on earth failed to keep up with their side of the deal. And therefore, *nobody* attained to the Righteousness that the Law commanded, and everyone was in line for God's Judgment. Everyone who was saved under the reign of the Old Covenant was saved the very *same* way that we are saved today:

By Grace alone through Faith alone

... and *not* by keeping the Commandments of the Law. They were saved by what they *believed in* and what they *trusted in* and what they *confessed*, and *not* by what they did, just like we do today. Now they didn't know about Jesus, but they knew about God. And without God, sovereignly moving on the people of the Old Covenant in Mercy, *nobody* would have believed and been saved.

So, human beings don't need more Commandments. Thousands of years of human history proves that to us. Because Commandments don't ever bring forth Righteousness. All that Commandments do is tell us how sinful we are, since we *can't* and we *don't* obey them without flaw. And *that* could hardly be called "Good News".

So, what we need is a “new heart” that produces “new desires”, godly desires, and that fuels “new behavior”. And that is *exactly* what God promised in the New Covenant. So, the New Covenant is glorious because it circumvents us, and exists between God and *Himself*. God has infallibly promised that He alone, within the three Persons of the Trinity, would do whatever is necessary to “see to it” that the Glory of His Grace would be seen and marveled at. And that happens by wicked rebels being saved, by what God alone has done for them. So, in the New Covenant, neither we nor our efforts are the *Cause* or the *Source* of fulfilling God’s Commandments, God alone is.

Under the operation of the New Covenant, God the Spirit comes to evil people in their lostness. And God sovereignly opens their blind eyes and unstops their deaf ears, and He takes out of them a stony heart and gives them a heart of flesh. And God does that all by Himself, without any cooperation or effort on our part at all. This is truly a sovereign Act of God in granting unworthy rebels the miracle of the New Birth.

And with those new eyes, we see Jesus in His splendor. And by seeing Him, we recognize the great contrast between Him and us, and *that* is the catalyst for genuine, Spirit-initiated Conviction. We then “deny ourselves” by coming to the insulting conclusion that there is no good thing in us, that we are very dirty and very evil. So, by beholding the pristine Majesty of the risen Lord, through the foolishness of the Word preached, we are smitten with conviction. We *know* we are lost; we *know* we are sinful. And we *know* we absolutely *deserve* Eternal Damnation. And we are ashamed. And we are brought low. And we are truly grieved over our sins.

But with those new ears, we hear the “Good News” that God has made a way for wicked sinners to be forgiven and made Righteous. God Himself took on flesh and became Man. And this God/Man lived a sinless Life for 33-1/2 years. He never transgressed a single Commandment. He loved God with all His Heart, Soul, Mind, and Strength. He loved His neighbor as Himself. He was perfectly led by God the Holy Spirit, and He was in perfect submission to the Will of God 24-hours every day and 7 days every week, for His entire Life. And so, Jesus fulfilled all of the Righteous Commands of the Law.

And that means that faith and trust in Jesus *personally*, and in His finished Work, is all the sacrifice required by God for every sin to be forgiven and for the very same Righteousness of Jesus Christ to be

imputed to us, by faith alone. Therefore, we are saved by Grace alone and through Faith alone in the finished Work of Christ alone, and *not* by our works. Not even by good *religious* works.

And that is the way that lost sinners are saved. But through what Peter says right here, we also know that the very *same* Grace, working through the very *same* Faith that saved us, also *sanctifies* us.

The Doctrine of "Union with Christ" has to do with the Work of Christ in us. And it teaches that unworthy sinners are "united" with Jesus Christ through Salvation. And so, based on our association with Jesus, we then become "joint heirs" with Jesus Christ, which is why we have an inheritance in Heaven. So, the Reformers taught that Salvation was the result of two things that are similar but not the same:

1. The Work of Jesus Christ, in living a sinless life and dying a *vicarious* (substitutionary) death on the Cross and rising from the dead and ascending into Heaven itself.
2. The Person of Jesus Christ, in Who He is as Lord and Master and Savior and God incarnate.

... and they took this Doctrine from **Hebrews 4:15&16** that says:

**15 For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as *we are*, yet without sin.**

**16 Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.**

So, we have to understand that as the visible Church hid and obscured the Scriptures by all of the ecclesiastical rules and regulations that they developed over the centuries, they had also hidden Jesus Christ from the people as well. And Jesus Himself was no more well-known to the people of the Church in the early 1500's than was the Scriptures. And that distance from Jesus, *personally*, is *always* the result of being distant from the Scriptures, because the Apostle Paul taught in **2 Corinthians 4** that we "see" the Glory of God in the Face of Jesus Christ through our ears as we hear the Word of God preached and taught in an ongoing, consistent, day in and day out, systematic, line-

upon-line and precept-upon-precept manner. So, the further away from Scripture you get in your beliefs and practices, the further away from Jesus you already are.

And so, one of the hallmarks of the Protestant Reformation was that these men not only took us back to Scripture, but they took us back to Jesus Christ as well. So, just a few decades after Martin Luther had sought for the patron saint of the miners to come to his rescue during that thunderstorm as he cried, "*Help me, Saint Anne*", because of the re-discovery of the Scriptures and the Biblical Gospel, the people of God no longer cried out for the dead saints to intercede on their behalf. They now understood that "Christ alone" would "mediate" or intercede between them and God because they had found that the Scriptures declared in **1 Timothy 2:5&6**:

**5 For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,**  
**6 who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony given at the proper time.**

So, as they began to deeply study the re-discovered Scriptures, the Reformers began to teach two things about Jesus Christ. They taught that Jesus was both:

- A. The *Price* of the Gospel
- B. The *Prize* of the Gospel

So, "Union with Christ" meant that *Jesus' finished Work* was the "Price of the Gospel" in that Jesus accomplished all three parts that were needed for the Gospel to exist:

1. His Sinless Life produced perfect Righteousness and fulfilled the Law.
2. His vicarious (substitutionary) Death on the Cross satisfied God's Justice against our sin.
3. His bodily Resurrection proved that God was pleased.

*But*, "Union with Christ" *also* meant that Jesus Himself, *Personally*, was also "The *Prize* of the Gospel", because the Prize is the

Person Who paid the price, which is *God in Christ*. In other words, the Gospel is the "Good News" that Jesus Christ paid the "Price" of suffering God's Wrath for our sins so that we could have the "Prize" of *growing* in our knowledge, and *growing* in our loving, and *growing* in our enjoying God forever, through Jesus Christ, in our progressive Sanctification. And Peter says that us "growing with respect to Salvation" or "becoming Holy" is how we are:

**Being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood,**

... but to what end? *Why* are we being made Holy? *Why* are we being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood? Peter tells us, at the end of verse 5, so that we may:

**... offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.**

.. or display the Worth and the Value that Jesus Christ really is.

Now to unfold the meaning of this and to show just how truly Biblical it is, I think it will be helpful to take a snapshot of this Truth from two different places:

1. From **Romans 5**
2. From **1 Corinthians 15**

... so look again at **Romans 5**, and keep in mind that the word "Gospel" means: *Good News*. And, in this case, it is God's "Good News" for the whole world. So, what is the "Price" and the "Prize" of that Good News according to **Romans 5**? Here's the Price from **Romans 5:6–8**:

**6 For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.**

**7 For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die.**

**8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.**

So, the "Price of the Gospel" is the Death of Jesus Christ. Verse 6: **"Christ died for the ungodly."** Verse 8: **"Christ died for us."** So God loved



us while we were sinners and paid a "Price" so that we might have an infinite "Prize". And that "Price" was the Death of His Son. But what was the "Prize" that Jesus bought for us when He paid that "Price"? Look at **Romans 5:9-11**:

**9 Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him.**

**10 For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.**

**11 And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.**

So, what did God purchase for us by the Price of his Son? Verse 9: **"We have now been justified by His Blood."** And more, Verse 9b: Because of that Justification **"we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him."** So, what do we need to be "saved" or "rescued" *from*? The Wrath of God. **"Much more... we shall be saved from the Wrath of God through Him"** (verse 9). And that is unspeakably glorious. But now we must ask, "Is our rescue from God's Wrath the highest, best, fullest, and most satisfying "Prize" of the Gospel"? And the answer is, "No".

Notice that verse 11 begins with something that is even better than being saved from God's Wrath when it begins with the words, **"And not only this..."**. So verse 10 ends: **"We shall be saved by his (Jesus Christ's) life."** And then verse 11 takes it up another notch by saying:

**And not only this, but we also exult in God...**

So, *that* is the final and highest and best "Good" of the Good News, exulting in God! Enjoying God! Delighting in God! Treasuring God! Finding the fullness of Joy and the fullest degree of satisfaction in God! So, we see that the Prize of the Gospel is God Himself! And then notice that Paul finishes his argument by repeating how we obtained that great Prize:

**Through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.**

So, the end of the Gospel is **"we also exult in God through our Lord**

**Jesus Christ.”** So, the highest, best, fullest, deepest, sweetest “Good” of the Gospel is:

God Himself through Jesus Christ, utterly enjoyed by His redeemed people!

And finally, the second snapshot of this comes from **1 Corinthians 15**. And what I see here is that the Gospel has six elements or six aspects, five of which are *explicit* in the text and one of which is *implicit*. Look at verses 1–4:

**1 Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand,**  
**2 by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain.**  
**3 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,**  
**4 and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,**

Now in this Passage, we see six elements of the Gospel. In other words, if any of these six were missing, there would be no Gospel.

- 1. The Gospel is a Pre-determined *Divine Plan*.** Verse 3b: “**Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures.**” In accordance with the Scriptures written hundreds of years *before* He died. Which means that the Gospel was pre-determined by God long before it actually took place.
- 2. The Gospel is a Literal *Historical Event*.** Verse 3b: “**Christ died...**” So the Gospel is not mythology. It is not merely ideas or feelings. It is an actual event. And without that actual literal historical event, there is no Gospel.
- 3. The Gospel is the *Divine Achievements* through that Event** And these are things that God accomplished in the Death of Jesus, long before we ever existed. Verse 3b: “**Christ died for our sins.**” And the phrase “**for our sins**” means that this Death had design and thought and purpose in it. It was not a random death brought about by evil men. No, this death was meant to accomplish something. And it accomplished three things:

- ✓ The covering of our sins (**Colossians 2:14**)
- ✓ The removal of God's Wrath (**Romans 8:3; Galatians 3:13**)
- ✓ The purchase of eternal life (**John 3:16**)

... these are objective Achievements of the Work of Jesus Christ *before* they are actually applied to anyone.

4. **The Gospel is a *free offer of Christ for faith*.** Verses 1-2: “. . . **the gospel I preached to you, which you *received*, in which you stand,<sup>2</sup> and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you *believed in vain*.**” The “Good News” of God’s Achievements in Jesus Christ become ours “by faith”, by believing and trusting in them, not by us giving a performance or by deserving or by working. So what God has done in Jesus Christ is entirely free to all who will have it. And it is received and made real to that individual by faith. And without the free offer of Christ by faith, there would be no Gospel.
5. **The Gospel is an *application to believers* of what God achieved in the Death of Jesus.** So when we believe we are forgiven for our sins (**The Acts 10:43**), we are justified (**Romans 5:1**), we receive eternal life (**John 3:16**), and dozens of other benefits. So the Gospel is the powerful personal application to us of what God achieved for us in Jesus Christ in His Life and on the Cross and raised up.
6. **The Gospel is the *enjoyment of fellowship with God Himself*.** And this is implicit in the word “Gospel,” or “Good News”.

So, if you ask: “*What is the highest and best and deepest and most satisfying and most complete “Good” of the Good News?*” The answer is: “*God Himself, known and loved and enjoyed by His redeemed people through the Person and Work of the Lord Jesus Christ.*”

In summary then, “God in Christ is both the “Price” and the “Prize” of the Gospel.” The Prize of the Gospel is the Person, Who paid the Price. So, the “Gospel-love” that God gives is *ultimately* the Gift of Himself!

Therefore, the way or the path for us to become Holy, or to abide in Jesus, or in the words of Peter, the path to us being “**built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood**”, so that we may “**offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ**”, is to escape the brutal

Old Covenant mentality that demands us to “do” something, and it is simply for us to adopt the New Covenant mentality of

“Longing and Tasting and Coming”

... which is what we were made for. This is what we lost in the Fall, and this is what we miss in our sin. And this is what Christ came to restore.

### **Psalm 16:11**

**In your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures  
Forevermore**

So, I offer this to you on behalf of Christ alone. And all it takes is for God to mercifully open your eyes so you are able to see the Beauty of Jesus Christ alone, and for Him to give you the will and power to trust in Him as your Treasure and your Lord and your Savior. And that is what God has promised to do in the New Covenant!

And this is what it means to “believe the Gospel”. And to give you one final enticement, I will read the most beautiful description I have ever read of what I mean by “Union with Christ”, and that the Love of God toward us is best expressed by the Gift of Himself through Jesus Christ alone. And it comes from Jonathan Edwards in 1731 when he was just 28 years old:

“The redeemed have all their objective “Good” in God. God Himself is the great “Good” which they are brought to the possession and enjoyment of by Redemption. He is the highest “Good”, and the sum of all that “Good” which Christ purchased. God is the Inheritance of the saints; He is the portion of their souls. God is their Wealth and Treasure, their Food, their Life, their Dwelling Place, their Ornament and Diadem, and their everlasting Honor and Glory. They have none in heaven but God; He is the great “Good” which the redeemed are received to at death, and which they are to rise to at the end of the world. The Lord God, He is the Light of the heavenly Jerusalem; and is the ‘River of the Water of Life’ that runs, and the Tree of Life that grows, ‘in the midst of the Paradise of God’. The glorious Excellencies and Beauty of God will be what will forever entertain the minds of the saints, and the Love of God will be their everlasting Feast. The redeemed will indeed enjoy other things; they will enjoy the angels, and will enjoy one another: but that which they shall enjoy in the angels, or each

other, or in anything else whatsoever, that will yield them Delight and Happiness, will be what will be seen of God in them.”<sup>1</sup>

Amen. Let's pray

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.

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<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “God Glorified in the Work of Redemption, by the Greatness of Man’s Dependence upon Him, in the Whole of It (1731)” [sermon on 1 Corinthians 1:29-31] in: Wilson H. Kinnach, Kenneth P. Minkema, and Douglas A. Sweeney, ed., *The Sermons of Jonathan Edwards: A Reader* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 74–75.