

Worship and Unbelief

1 Peter 2:1 ESV (Pg. 588) So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander. **2** Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation— **3** if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good. **4** As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, **5** you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. **6** For it stands in Scripture: “Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.” **7** So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,” **8** and “A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense.” They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do. **9** But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. **10** Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

- I. I love the book of 1st Peter. I have returned to it again and again in the last year. Essentially, it is a book that teaches Christians how to have a gospel-centered, “big-picture” perspective on the suffering that will inevitably come their way.
 - A. Because suffering is the central theme of the book, it might seem odd that the book also spends a lot of time talking about worship.
 1. In chapter one he speaks of how “**the tested genuineness of your faith...may be found to result in praise and glory and honor**”¹ (worship); and how that believing in him, we “rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory”² (exuberant praise).
 2. In chapter 3, he says “**in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy**”³ (practical worship), even in the midst of suffering.
 3. He builds on this theme of suffering and praise even further in chapter 4, reminding us to “**rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings**”⁴
 - B. But we have difficulty understanding Peter’s exhortation when the church struggles to define worship. For far too many of us, worship is only understood in terms of music, and especially church music. But this thinking is way off!
 1. I am grateful for music that helps me to devotionally meditate on God. But so much more than notes and melodies should inspire worship in me.
 - a) Beauty should. Knowledge and wisdom should. The love of my friends and family should. The simple provision of daily bread should!
 - b) More than anything, every reminder of the grace of God given to me in Christ Jesus - in prayer, in the scriptures, in preaching, in blessing and suffering - should prompt a response of praise in my grateful heart.
 2. If I must always be “warmed up” or “gotten in the mood” with skillfully played or sung songs in order to lavish praise on the one who saved me, then worship is reduced to a pagan ritual in order to conjure my god.
 - C. The point is that worship is not one activity among many for the Christian, it is the totality of his or her life. David Petersen has said that worship is “**a comprehensive category describing the Christian’s total existence**”⁵.

1. We don't "get our worship on"⁶ like the song says; we *live* worship as the air we breathe. We don't put it on and take it off; rather, we constantly return to it, increasingly immersing ourselves in it. A true Christian is as much defined by an existence in worship as a fish is by its existence in water.
 2. More than that, it is God himself, not any person, who defines the nature of acceptable worship. Petersen further states that "the worship of the living and true God is essentially an engagement with him on the terms that he proposes and in the way that he alone makes possible."⁷
- II. With all of that in mind, let's take a look at what 1 Peter 2 tells us about the nature of God-pleasing, gospel-saturated worship:
- A. The connection to worship in the first thing Peter says may not be that obvious: "So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander."
 1. Do you notice something about that list of sins? They are all against others in some way. I can only be malicious or deceitful **to you**. I can only put up a hypocritical front **for you**. I can only envy **what you have**. I can only slander **someone else**. All these are rooted in **selfishness** of one kind or another.
 2. So the first step of true worship is to think corporately. This is not to imply that you can't (or shouldn't) ever worship in solitude, but that your life as a worshipper is never complete until it is intertwined with that of others.
 - a) Again, this is not about just going to church but about a life of breaking bread, fellowship, prayers, and mutual teaching mentioned in Acts 2:42.
 - b) This is why membership in a local body is so important, and why internet, TV, and VR "churches" can't replace the physical gathering of the saints.
 - B. Next, "Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation". Some versions say the "pure milk of the word", since that is what is implied in the Greek⁸. This tells us a number of things:
 1. First, when Peter commands us to be "like newborn infants", he is reminding us that worship demands that we embrace innocence and dependence. We're not posturing, grasping for power, or trying to manipulate God. On the contrary, we are trustingly clinging to Him as the source of our existence!
 2. Second, we see that all meaningful worship is rooted in scripture (the Word). Worship that is not theologically sound, or that is flat-out non-biblical, can't benefit us spiritually. It may assist us therapeutically, but only superficially.
 3. Thirdly, we see that by desiring the Word, we grow. **Matthew 4:4 ESV But he answered, "It is written, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."**
 - a) A baby doesn't grow by trying to grow, or worrying about growth; a baby grows by simply eating what its mother provides.
 - b) We should spend less time worrying about how to grow more spiritual, and more just time devouring the Word!
 - C. Peter next adds a condition to the growth promised as we worshipfully consume the word: "**if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.**"
 1. Everything Peter is saying applies only to true believers in Jesus. Those that have never initially tasted the goodness of the Lord in his saving grace can never truly worship or grow by his word; no matter what they say or sing.

- a) When I was a kid, Country music stars would frequently take a break from their drinkin' and cheatin' songs to release albums of church music, as though they could just switch gears and be pleasing to the Lord!
 - b) **Isaiah 1:7 ESV** "What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says the Lord; I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of well-fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats."
- 2. Acceptable worship only comes from the lives and lips that have tasted the goodness of the Lord, **and** have lost their appetite for anything else. True worship never comes from right actions, but from hearts reborn.
- D. "As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." In these two verses, as well as the next, Peter cites a messianic prophecy from Isaiah 28:16:
 - 1. We see from it that worship is always counter-cultural, because it involves approaching Christ, the living stone, "rejected by men". This puts believers in a position of great wisdom, because, by the grace of God, we have looked to Jesus, whom God himself has deemed "chosen and precious".
 - 2. In doing this, we become living stones (like Christ) and are built up **together** (there's that corporate element again!) into a House of Praise for our King.
 - 3. This leads to the great purpose of our salvation in general, and of worship in particular: to be a "holy priesthood", not offering blood and pleading for mercy, but sacrifices of praise, acceptable to God because of Christ!
- III. Next we see the epicenter of this teaching on worship: **For it stands in Scripture: "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame."** So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone," and "A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense." They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.
 - A. Peter exposes a tension, one side pulling on the other, in these verses. It is a tension between "The Chief Cornerstone" and "A stone of stumbling and a rock of offense"; between "whoever believes in him" and "those who do not believe". Between those who have honor and those who will be put to shame.
 - 1. By God's sovereign decree Christ is the cornerstone of all that God is building. Everything is central to him. He'll never do anything outside of him.
 - 2. Therefore, we should be very leery of anything that seems religious, churchy, or even kind of "Christian" that isn't surrounded by, filled with, submitted to, exalting and proclaiming what Christ has done for God's glory on our behalf.
 - a) This is not always easy! I've shared before that I grew up in a church with an unhealthy emphasis on the Holy Spirit and his gifts. That didn't seem wrong since the Holy Spirit is just as much "God" as Jesus is!
 - b) What I didn't understand at the time was that John 14-16 teaches that the Holy Spirit's job is to point to us Jesus and his redeeming work; not to emphasize himself!
 - 3. A church that is off-course can emphasize the gifts of Holy Spirit, End Time Prophecy, Messianic Judaism, Social Justice, or 1,000 other things; but any

- focus other than Christ is counter-productive, deceptive and ultimately destructive. Christ Jesus alone is the Chief Cornerstone of God's building.
- B. Because of this, God promises that those who put their trust in the Cornerstone will **never** be put to shame. To put your trust in him means to place all of your confidence in him, existing for the joy of worshipping him; it's not just to believe in him like some good luck charm, but to live by Him alone. And that's worship!
- C. But there is a whole other group of people addressed in this passage: those who do not believe. These are those who have rejected the Cornerstone; who, instead of anchoring to him, have stumbled over him; instead of believing in him have been offended by him. Their stumbling was destined, Peter says, because they have not simply and confidently believed the word that saves them.
1. When I saw this in context, a question arose that I'd never had before: What is the opposite of worship? Is there a "dark" to its "light"; a down to its up?
 - a) I am convinced that **The opposite of worship is unbelief**. If worship constitutes our total existence as believers, as I proposed earlier, then to choose not to believe is to refuse to give worship to the one to whom it is due. In other words, refusing to worship is evidence of a lacking belief.
 - b) There is nothing more offensive to God than unbelief. To not believe is to accuse God of lies; to claim to be more qualified to save yourself than he.
 2. Therefore, all sin is essentially the sin of unbelief. Sin says, "I don't need what you have. I can't find satisfaction in you". It was because of the sin of unbelief that the Holy Spirit was sent to convict the world. **John 16:8a ESV** **And when he (the Holy Spirit) comes, he will convict the world concerning sin... 9b ...because they do not believe in me.**
- D. Worship is the opposite. Peter makes this point by contrast next: **"But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."**
1. As believers, we are a chosen race. "God's grace rather than human choice is the ultimate explanation for why some people come to God and others do not...therefore no one can boast of being included."⁹
 2. But more than that, He uses further covenantal language by calling the Body of Christ a "royal priesthood" and a holy nation" Peter is applying to the church what was said about the kingdom of Israel in Exodus 19:5-6! His point is that God is dealing with his people through a new, better covenant!
- E. And what is that purpose of all of these benefits lavished on us? "that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light". Worship is the point of our redemption and our salvation!
1. And who has more reason to worship and rejoice? Once we were not a people. Paul says we were aliens and strangers to all God's promises¹⁰, but now we have been adopted. Now we are God's people!
 2. Once we were languishing in our sin and degradation, but at the cross Jesus lavished mercy and grace on us, his enemies. Now we have received the mercy that we required to live!

F. Is there any reason to remain in unbelief? Let us repent and proclaim his excellencies in our music, our prayers, our preaching, our work, our parenting, our studies, our marriages, our eating, our sleeping, our suffering, and our dying. Let praise be our food, and worship our breath. To God be the glory!

¹ 1 Peter 1:7 ESV

² 1 Peter 1:8 ESV

³ 1 Peter 3:15 ESV

⁴ 1 Peter 4:13 ESV

⁵ Peterson, David; *Engaging with God: A Biblical Theology of Worship*, Downers Grove, IL, IVP Academic © 1992; pg. 18

⁶ "Beautiful Day" by Jamie Grace (from album "Ready To Fly" © 2014 Gotee Records

⁷ *ibid*; pg. 20

⁸ "'Spiritual' comes from Greek *logikos*, which echoes 'word' (*logos*) of 1:23." Note on 1 Peter 2:1-2; *ESV Large Print Study Bible*; Pg. 2642; © 2008 Crossway

⁹ Note on 1 Peter 2:9; *ESV Large Print Study Bible*; Pg. 2642; © 2008 Crossway

¹⁰ Ephesians 2:12