

I Peter 2:1-12 Becoming What You Are!

Introduction

Who you are and the character qualities each one of us displays matters infinitely more than the things we do, however important the latter may be. Although any division between the two is of course artificial, our character over time shapes and directs our conduct. People around us may hear the words we say and understand what we are attempting to communicate, but the witness of our lives is even more powerful to the various individuals with whom we come into contact during each day of our lives. Is the image you and I are presenting to the world a genuine reflection of who we really are? The number of people for whom that could not be said I suspect is far greater than is often realised. The former Iranian Interior minister Ali Kordan now has plenty of time to spend with his family after the Iranian parliament voted on 4 November 2008 to sack him for lying about his qualifications. The degree in question was a doctorate he claimed to have been awarded by Oxford University. Mr Kordan in fact does not have any degrees at all – not normally a problem –however as a man who had worked for a number of years as a University lecturer, a post almost certainly obtained based on his claims of studying at Oxford, it called into question his personal integrity [BBC News website 4.11.08].

Peter in the second chapter of his letter to these young churches moves on from consideration of our reasons for celebrating God's goodness and the teaching of God's Word that motivates us to live holy lives, to consideration of what it means (I Peter 1:22) to *have sincere love for your brothers* [and sisters] and how we can *love one another deeply from the heart*. What guidance does Peter give us in these verses?

1. A Call for Spiritual Progress (I Peter 2:1-3)

1Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. 2Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, 3now that you have tasted that the Lord is good. (a) **The Need for Growth** so that by it you may grow up Growth is natural in any living thing. The rings of a tree tell the story of its life. A dendrochronologist can find out a lot of information about a tree's life, its rate of growth or lack of growth possibly in extreme climactic conditions such as a severe drought. God our loving heavenly Father wants us to grow in our relationship with Him. In order for that to happen it is a conscious decision of our wills to spent time reading and reflecting on God's Word, in fellowship with other Christians and in a variety of forms of Christian service in the church and community. (b) **The Way We Grow** *2Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk* The little people in our families have incredible lungs, even when they are tiny if lunch is late their little lungs are used to full capacity to communicate that they have been neglected! In the same way Peter is suggesting that a Christian should have a similar enthusiasm to want to become more like Jesus and to live in a lifestyle that reflects His values and principles. There should be a frustration with ourselves when our progress is slow, as Paul revealed in Romans 7:14-25, but instead of giving up or settling for spiritual mediocrity we should be determined to retain our passion and zeal for God to stand for Him and to witness for Him by our words and lives. To that end we must ask God to give us a greater hunger to get to grips with the message of the Scriptures, in order that we may be strengthened by its promises, encouraged by its assurances, challenged by its rebukes and mindful of its warnings. Psalm 34:8a declares: *Taste and*

*see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him. (c)***The Purpose of Our Growth** so that by it you may grow up in your **salvation**, *3now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.* Paul in Ephesians 4:13-16 expands on this point and explains what God desires for His children. *Until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. 14Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. 15Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. 16From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work; In order for that to become a reality there also has to be a letting go of things that could slow or even prevent our spiritual growth. Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind (I Peter 2:1).* Paul uses the language of spiritual fruit in Galatians 5:13-23 to make the same point as Peter does at the start of his second chapter of this letter. *You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. 14The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbour as yourself." 15If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other. 16So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. 17For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. 18But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law. 19The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; 20idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions 21and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. 22But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.* The Christian who desires to become closer to the Lord brings pleasure to His holy heart. Is Jesus full of joy over how you reflected something of His values in the past week? Or would He be embarrassed at the inconsistent way in which we live our lives? We have the responsibility to make those choices!

2. A Consideration of Spiritual Privileges (I Peter 2:4-6)

4As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him— 5you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. 6For in Scripture it says: "See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame. Peter is continuing to speak of the development of spiritual fruit in our lives. He uses the present tense of the verbs here to indicate that this is an ongoing pattern for our lives. He literally says: **As you continually come to Christ** (by an initial faith commitment and by ongoing worship through Scripture and prayer) **you are yourselves being built up into a spiritual house.** (a) **The One through Whom We are Blessed** (v4) *As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him* All that we do as Christians has Christ at its centre if it is to be blessed. The modern bracelet embroidered with WWJD captures it well. ‘What Would Jesus Do?’ he is our role model and our lives depend on His wonderful love and encouragement to us. Do you know Him? Have you put your faith and trust in our wonderful Saviour? Peter used imagery used of Himself by Jesus in Matthew 21:42-44, in words to the religious leaders of the day: *42Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures:" "The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvellous in our*

eyes'? 43"Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit. 44He who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed. What God establishes can never be destroyed. Paul picks up on this imagery in Ephesians 2:20-22: 20*built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with **Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.** 21In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. 22And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.* Yet even though the final victory of King Jesus is certain not everyone will choose to believe. There would be those who thought the death of Jesus on the cross was the end. Isaiah prophesied: *He was assigned a grave with the wicked and with the rich in His death, though He had done no violence nor was any deceit in His mouth (Isaiah 53:9). He was rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him (I Peter 2:4).* When God says 'Yes' and human beings say 'No', there can only be one outcome! Paul in his glorious passage on the resurrection in I Corinthians 15:24-25 says of Jesus: *Then the end will come when He hands over the kingdom to God the Father after He has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet.* (b) **The Means by which We are Blessed** *as you come to Him (v4);* Peter calls for a conscious continual turning to Christ and seeking to be like Him. This Christ-centeredness includes but goes beyond the initial looking to Him for salvation when we repent of our sins and acknowledge Him as our Lord and Saviour. It is an appeal to seek more of Him to seek to be like Him. In Paul's words *For to me, to live is Christ (Philippians 1:21).* What words would encapsulate your passion for living. We are to be a God focussed, Christ centred and Spirit empowered people. Our Church mission and vision statement declares that we are: Building a Christ centred Church Looking to Christ; Growing in Christ; Sharing Christ; this mission statement fits so well with the New Testament calling of the followers of Jesus. Peter envisages us as 'chips off the block' of Christ *as living stones (v5);* that is, that we take something of the fragrance of Jesus with us wherever we go. As we point people to Him by our words and our lives we bring glory to His name and honour to His cause. The contrast between our state before conversion dead in transgressions (Ephesians 2:5) to being made alive with Christ comes about through the enabling power of the blessed Holy Spirit. What difference does this make Peter? Verse 5 states here: *you... are being built...* often as a building is erected the details are not clear in the early stages concerning the style of house or workplace, in the same way God's formation of our character takes shape over a considerable period of time. Each one of us has a metaphorical sign over us 'God at work' transforming us into a people that reflect more closely His beloved Son. However it is a work in which we participate with Him. In I Corinthians 3:9-15 Paul gives a very clear challenge to of all Christians in each generation. 9*For we are God's... building, 10 By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds. 11For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, 13his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. 14If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. 15If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.* In this life we can keep much of what we do hidden even from people close to us if that is what we choose to do, but the spiritual investment we make (or don't make) produces results that will one day be evident to all. God's blessings will only be poured out as we in obedience follow the footsteps of our master. Are there any issues that have distracted you from following Jesus that you need to address before God? If so please don't

delay in getting back on track with the Lord. (c) **The Results of Being Blessed** Verse 5 declares here: *you...[plural] are being built into a spiritual house.* (Hebrews 3:6 uses the same imagery –*But Christ is faithful as a son over God’s house. We are His house if we hold on to our courage and the hope of which we boast.* The stones (bricks today), on their own, can never accomplish anything going solo. Likewise the effectiveness of each Christian is not just what we do as individuals but supremely what we do in co-operation with other Christians, in fellowship with fellow believers. Peter also speaks of Christians as a holy priesthood (v5). W.H. Griffiths Thomas in his I Peter commentary stated: ‘Never in the New Testament is an individual believer spoken of in the singular number as a priest.’ In the Temple in Jerusalem they worked in teams without exception. This principle was carried over into the Christian Church. We also are offering spiritual sacrifices (v5). In the New Testament we are urged to offer our bodies *as living sacrifices* (Romans 12:1); the financial offerings we give in church to God’s work Paul calls *a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God* (Philippians 4:18). This expression is used in a fuller way in Hebrews 13:15-16 where the following challenge is given: *Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name. 16And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.* The most wonderful result of being blessed through our obedience to Christ is that when we consecrate our lives to follow the Lord that it is acceptable to God (v5). Not something we hope but a fact we know! Do you have the assurance in your heart of being loved by God? Do you know that you are secure in His grace? He desires each of His children to be encouraged by this fact.

3. A Challenge to Spiritual People (I Peter 2:7-10)

7Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, "The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone,"8and, "A stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall." They stumble because they disobey the message—which is also what they were destined for. 9But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. 10Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Peter draws attention here to some contrasts. (a) **A Contrast of Attitude** (vs7-8) The fact of the presence of Jesus on earth cannot be contested by sensible people but there is a necessity to respond to His claim to be the Son of God. He was either a lunatic –he believed it but it wasn’t true; a liar - he didn’t believe it and only sought to deceive people or Lord – it was true and He knew that He was the truth. John 14:6 puts each of us on the spot. Jesus said: *I am the way and the truth and the life. No-one comes to the Father except through Me.* Do you acknowledge Jesus? Is He your Lord and Saviour? Peter puts us on the spot and hopes that we like his readers have acknowledged the Lordship of Jesus in our lives. (b) **A Contrast of Experience** (vs7-8) This contrast is between those who honour the Lord and those who dishonour Him by ignoring His claims on their lives. To those who honour the Lord *this stone is precious* (v7). However by contrast there are those who reject Him. Peter quotes Psalm 118:22 and Isaiah 8:14 to let his readers know that this sad fact is not unexpected. In Psalm 118 this quotation follows immediately after the Psalmists declaration that God has *become my salvation* (Psalm 118:21). I have found the Lord –by implication he asks us -have you? In Isaiah 8:13-14 there is the same contrast as here in I Peter 2. 13 *The Lord Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy, He is the one you are to fear, He is the one you are to dread,14 and He will be a sanctuary; but for both houses of Israel He will*

be a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall. And for the people of Jerusalem he will be a trap and a snare. Can you testify to the Lord coming into your life? Can you recount evidence of God at work in your life last week? Last month? Or at specific times since you put your faith in Him. (c) **A Contrast of Status** (9-10) *10Once you were not a people, **but now** you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, **but now** you have received mercy.* Peter calls us to get a grasp of the sense of privilege of belonging to God. We have received the undeserved favour of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. What does this mean for us? Peter points to four things in verse nine (i) *you are a chosen people*, As Paul told the Galatian Christians *You brothers like Isaac are children of the promise* (Galatians 4:28) At the ordinary human level it should go without saying that an adopted child is a wanted child. There should be no disputing that fact. However occasionally this is sadly not the case, but with God everyone of His children is wanted and therefore special to Him. You may not be special to anyone else on earth but as a Christian you are precious to Him. What an honour is ours. (ii) *you are a royal priesthood*, God always has work to do for His people everyone has a ministry –the only question is what forms of service He wants me to engage in at the present time. This has not changed from the Old Testament. In Exodus 19:5-6 God told the Israelites *Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.* The priesthood of all believers is a vital and precious principle from the Scriptures. I thank God that we see so much evidence of this reality in the life of our church. Privileges always bring responsibilities in God's service. (iii) *you are a holy nation*, Our number one identity is not Scottish or British or some other ethnic label, we are *fellow-citizens with God's people* (Ephesians 2:19); and *our citizenship is in heaven* (Philippians 3:20). In every nation on planet earth you and I have brothers and sisters. In every country we have relatives! In case we have still not grasped it Peter gives a fourth reference (iv) *you are a people belonging to God*, In recent years there has been much discussion in the media and in the lives of ordinary people around the subject of belonging. Where do I fit in? All of us have a deep need to belong somewhere and to some people. Paul told the Corinthians (I Cor. 6:20) *You were bought at a price. Therefore glorify God with your body.* God values you because He sent His Son to die in your place on the cross therefore He has a right to expect you will also treasure His gift to you of eternal life and our responsibility to live in the light of such an honour. What is the purpose of these blessings from the Lord? *that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light.* I thank the Lord for the encouragement it is to me when people in this church tell me about their experiences of speaking to other people about the Lord and sometimes of the encouraging responses as well. May God give us a sense of expectancy to see Him at work in the lives of other people through us.

4. A Conclusion stating Spiritual Principles (I Peter 2:11-12)

11Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. 12Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us. In order to behave in a manner appropriate for children of the King of Kings Peter encourages them to always be self-disciplined keeping their lives free from anything that could undermine their witness. We need to realise that Peter here is speaking both to individuals and congregations. Individually we must live God-honouring lives because that pleases God, but also because it has an impact on how the church with which we are associated is viewed. I praise God that the good witness

of this church in our local community has been a real blessing to us as it has drawn a growing number of people to want to associate with us. May God help us by His Spirit to keep up the good work for His glory, Amen.