

We are once again in Peter's first epistle, chapter 2:4-5. I've entitled my message to you, "Still Coming in Secret Devotion." This is an amazing passage. As you will see, it is rich in inspiring theology capable of stirring our souls to new levels of excitement and worship. On the surface it may seem a bit curious, or enigmatic or mysterious, but as we dig deep into the earth of Scripture we will be able to tap into some massive veins of spiritual truth that will bring joy to all who know and love Christ. Because here we will mine a magnificent treasure of divine wisdom that God has revealed to us. It's ours for the taking and I pray that each of us will carry out of this place some golden nuggets of truth that will encourage and strengthen us and give great glory to God.

May I remind you that in chapter 1 Peter has reminded the persecuted saints of the supernatural nature of their salvation and the unimaginable benefits that belong to all who are united to Christ in faith. Then in chapter 2, in light of the redemption that is ours, combined with the living and enduring Word of God which was preached to all of us, he exhorts us to jettison our sin and then to long for the transforming, life-giving milk of His Word. In verse 2 he says, "so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord." All who know Christ as Savior will quickly acknowledge indeed, He has lavished His love upon me. But Peter doesn't stop there, as if all of our responsibilities have ended. In fact, there is no hint of our salvation being purely some past event with no present or future involvement on our part or even God's part, for that matter. But rather, we see the inspired apostle now exhorting us to not only long for the pure milk of the Word, but to keep coming to Christ, and for good reason.

Notice what he says beginning in verse 4. "And coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected by men, but choice and precious in the sight of God, 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." What the Holy Spirit is saying here through the inspired apostle is simply this. 'Not only do I want you to have a perpetual longing for spiritual growth that can only result from feeding upon My Word, but I want you to continue coming to Me with a passionate intensity.' I have lived with this passage and I believe it would be helpful for you to see this continual coming from the vantage points found in this text. I believe we can see this if we understand what it means to do four things. First, to come to Christ, to know what that means. Secondly, to come to life. Thirdly, to come to a spiritual house and a holy priesthood, and fourthly to come to worship.

What does it mean to come to Christ? He says in verse 4, "And coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected by men, but choice and precious in the sight of God." We know that Christ is that living stone. Literally in the original language it means a building stone or a cornerstone. In fact in verse 6 Peter quotes Isaiah 28:16 where he says, "Behold, I lay in Zion a choice stone, a precious corner stone, and he who believes in Him will not be disappointed." For those who refuse to believe in the "stone which the builders rejected...He is a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense" as verses 7-8 go on to tell us. Likewise, Paul reminded the Jews in Corinth of the pre-incarnate Messiah in 1 Corinthians 10. It was the Lord Jesus Christ who was their rock, their defense, their provision, the one who sustained them in the wilderness. There he said in 1 Corinthians 10:4, "and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ."

So, when we come back to Peter, he is reminding us that we come to Christ as a living stone, as the cornerstone, as the foundation stone of the Church. Indeed when we first come to Christ in salvation, when we first place our faith in the Gibraltar of His saving grace, we are therefore secured by Him forever and for certain. But what does it mean, then, when the Holy Spirit tells us in this text, "And

coming to Him”? The King James Version says, “To whom coming, as unto a living stone.” Obviously Peter’s readers had already come to Christ in salvation, so what does this mean, “And coming to Him”? It’s interesting that the word *coming* is often translated in the scriptures as looking, trusting, believing, seeking, even drawing near to God. Grammatically in verse 4 it represents a fervent, intense, concentrated, passionate coming, or drawing near to God with the intention of staying and living in His presence. The writer of Hebrews uses this term to describe one who continues to come to Christ in prayer. In chapter 4:16 we read, “. . .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.”

Here in 1 Peter it is a present participle grammatically, so it is “and coming.” It’s not “and having come,” it’s not something in the past that he’s referring to but rather we continue coming. We keep on continuing to rely on Christ. We keep drawing near to Him, seeking to live in His presence. We keep actively seeking His face. As the psalmist would say, “nearness to God is my only good.” The only time we can find joy and peace and contentment is when we continue to draw near to Him, as we did originally when we sought Him in salvation; when by the grace of God the Spirit of God quickened our hearts and we saw our sin, and in a penitent, broken way we came to Him originally. We are to continue seeking His mercy and grace, thanking Him for all He has given us, forever rejoicing in His precious blood. This is what I like to call a secret devotion to God, a passionate, personal pursuit of holiness, whereby we keep on coming into His presence. All too often I fear people come to Christ originally in salvation and that’s kind of the end of it.

This is what we do when we worship at the Lord’s table in that precious memorial of communion. We have an opportunity to keep coming to Him for continued praise and thanksgiving, for renewed strength and blessing. In fact, in 1 Corinthians 10:16 the apostle Paul says, “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ?” By the way, participation is *koinonia*, a sharing, a communion, a fellowship in the blood of Christ. He goes on to say, “The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?” Of course the answer is yes. As we come to that table of blessing, our souls are nourished and we celebrate our union with Christ. Yet another opportunity to keep coming. In fact, Jesus said in John 6:55-56, “For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him.” There we have a spiritual, certainly not a literal, analogy meaning that when we believe in His atoning work we have spiritual life, and that is necessary for our spiritual life. It’s something that we keep coming to. Therefore, in communion we have a marvelous opportunity for our ongoing coming to Christ.

I would ask you, is this the characteristic of your life? Or if you examine your heart do you have to admit that you really don’t keep coming to Christ? “I kind of did that once, and I’ll show up for church now and then but that’s kind of the extent of it.” Are you one who is intent on drawing near to God? Is that the passion of your heart? Are you longing to know more of Him? Do you long to know more of His mercy and grace and to have the discernment that He offers you through the power of His Spirit and His Word? Do you long to commune with Him in secret devotion on a daily basis, even on a moment-by-moment basis? Do you have a longing that refuses to allow you to be distracted with all of the trivial stuff of the world, all of the trivial pursuits, all of the evil temptations that are out there?

Think with me for a moment. Do you remember when you first came to Christ? Can you go back there with me in your mind? Do you remember when you first trembled at your sin and you cast yourself at the foot of the cross and cried out for mercy and placed your faith in the Lord’s saving grace? That was when you first came. I remember it well. I was a nine-year-old boy. What an incredible moment that

was in my life, to know that my sins were forgiven, to experience the miracle of the new birth. Certainly I didn't understand all of the glorious theological implications of that decision, but I knew enough to know that I was once a sinner and now I am saved by the grace of God.

Do you remember on that day that you came to Christ, do you remember how nothing on earth could possibly be more precious to you than the Savior? Some of you came running, some of you came more slowly, but we all came in faith believing. We all understood the invitation of Jesus, "Come unto Me, all you who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest." Do you remember when you found that rest? Do you remember that time when you came, trembling and broken and humble and contrite and bankrupt and desperate? When you came to the Lover of your Soul and then found out the joy of sins forgiven? Do you remember that day when nothing could distract you from basking in His glory and His grace? Nothing was more sacred to you at that moment than doing His will and experiencing the intimate communion of being united to Christ, and now being adopted by the Father into the family of God. Now you're one of His children.

Folks, whenever you go back to that day, and I hope you often will, I hope you get lost in the wonder of it all. When I go back there, I find myself being overwhelmed with both joy and sorrow. With joy in that my sins were forgiven, and with sorrow knowing all the sins I continue to commit. All the wasted opportunity, all the shallow faith, all the lack of spiritual discipline. How we need to recapture that moment of our salvation and renew our commitment to keep coming to the Savior as we did that day. How easy it is to stop. So often I fear that we're like little toddlers. We look at one thing and then another and then there's something else and we're just distracted by everything in the world. We're seemingly unable to remain focused on the things of God, preferring instead to look hither and yon at every diversion. Whatever happened to our original coming? Why can't it be as fresh and exciting as that original step of faith? It's not that we come again for salvation, but for sanctification, for communion, for fellowship.

Think of it this way: we no longer come as slaves of sin but now as joint heirs with Jesus. We no longer come as strangers but as children of God. Now we come to lay our heads on the lap of our heavenly Father. We're not coming as sons of disobedience, condemned to die. Why don't we keep coming? It's one thing to come before a judge as a violent criminal deserving of death, but it's altogether something else to come to a loving Father with gladness in our heart. Someday we will all die. And for many of us we will know fairly well when that day will be, or at least the season of that time. On that day, certainly in that season of our life, our coming to Christ will pick up its pace. Someday we will all approach that final mile of life's journey and our end will be in sight. Suddenly, all of the distractions of life lose their luster.

I've been in many hospital rooms of people that are dying. It's funny that the football games are just not that important any more. Movies no longer have any appeal. Do you know what they want more than anything? They want you to read Scripture to them. At that time of life our pace in coming to Christ will quicken. Our race is almost won and suddenly all the cares of this world pass and all our consuming focus seems to be on the finish line, when we will look into the face of God and not only behold His glory, but share in it, when faith suddenly becomes sight. That day when suddenly the bride will be able to embrace the groom. My point is simply this: would that we run that race with such enthusiasm and singular determination right now! How sad to think of all the trivial and sinful distractions that have diverted our ongoing coming to Christ.

Can you imagine if you were dying of some dreadful disease and some doctor across the ocean has guaranteed for certain that he could cure you. Now you receive an invitation to go to him and you are filled with great joy. You embark upon the journey on a grand ship across the ocean to carry you to your destination of healing. But on the way you ask the captain, "Please stop at this island. I want to know more of the beauty of that island." A few days later, "Stop here at this island. I would like to hear the songs of these people. I would like to get to know the people here, and see the games here, and enjoy the endless opportunity to sample all of the things of the world on this trip. Oh yes, doctor, I'm still coming, but I cannot restrain myself from sampling so many wonderful and intriguing things that bring such pleasure to my life even though they are fleeting." Of course only a fool would engage in such conduct. Yet I fear as Christians we often do the very same thing.

But instead, dear friends, our hearts should be deliberately and continually seeking to live in His presence, and to enjoy a secret devotion and communion with our God that exceeds all of the pleasures of this world. And anybody that knows that secret devotion, anybody that understands the glories of those times of communion when you're rich in His Word or you're fellowshiping with another believer, you quickly see that this is greater than all that life could offer, and it's a sample, a foretaste of glory divine. So first, we not only come to Christ initially in salvation but we continue to draw near to a living stone, as the text says.

Secondly, we come to life. That's a fascinating thought to me, the one rejected by men, and the one who continues to be rejected, is a living stone. We celebrate that, do we not? The tomb is empty. The Lord Jesus Christ is alive. Furthermore, He is the source of life to all who believe. He is also the source of death to all who refuse. These are those who have rejected the living stone. In verse 4 Peter tells us, "And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men." Literally in the original language it means 'rejected, having been thoroughly tested and examined.' Indeed, the Lord Jesus Christ did not measure up to the selfish and self-righteous expectations of the Jewish elite. They looked at Him and said "He could not possibly be the cornerstone of Judaism, so we want nothing to do with Him. Crucify Him!" and they rejected Him with utmost contempt. Likewise, the Romans examined Him and also concluded that He was at best a fool and at worst an insurrectionist, worthy of crucifixion. And still today many people look at the living stone and want nothing to do with Him.

But not so for those who have been born again, who have been given life by the power of His saving grace. For us He is exactly what our heavenly Father says He is, "choice and precious in the sight of God." He is choice in that He was God's chosen one. Isaiah 42:1 describes this. "My chosen one in whom My soul delights." Also the prophet Micah tells us in chapter 5:2 that the "ruler in Israel" is the One whose "goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity." Not only was the Lord Jesus Christ ordained in eternity past to be the chosen one, but notice He is also, in verse 4, "...precious in the sight of God." Precious means exceedingly valuable, highly valued, costly. Indeed He is the perfect, priceless, living cornerstone of the Church. He is the one to whom we continue to come in secret devotion. As Paul said in Ephesians 2:19-22, for we are "no longer strangers and aliens, but...fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit." For believers the Holy Spirit has taken up permanent residence in His Church. It is in this earthly sanctuary that we abide in this body of Christ. We continually come to the life-giving Rock of Ages who is God's choice and precious stone.

Truly, there is no life apart from Christ, only meaningless survival. You can see this right now if you drive down to the river and see all of the people out enjoying the water. You can see this in other places where people are frolicking here and there and have no desire to come and worship the Lord. People without Christ have no real joy, no real hope, no faith, no meaning. Just live for today, for tomorrow we die. For them, joy is linked directly to their circumstances. If things are going good, then they're happy. If things are going bad then they're down. There is an endless pursuit of pleasure. God tells us through the apostle Paul in Ephesians 4:18, they have no spiritual life, "having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart."

Over the course of my life and ministry I have had the opportunity to counsel quite a few of what you might call has-beens; professional athletes, musicians, business moguls, politicians, many people that you would know. One of the common themes that surfaces when you encounter these people, many of which do not know Christ, is a theme that goes something like this. "All of my glory days are over. I feel as though I've wasted my whole life." My answer to them is, "My friend, you've not had a life, nor will you ever have a life apart from Christ." Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life, no man can come to the Father but through Me." You must be born again. In Proverbs 14:27 we read that, "The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life." And in Proverbs 19:23 we read that, "The fear of the Lord leads to life, and he who has it will abide in satisfaction; He will not be visited with evil."

Child of God, when we continue to draw near to the living stone, we experience more and more the exhilarating joy of life in Christ. I'm sure some of you name the name of Christ but you really don't experience any joy, any real life and exhilaration in Christ. Why is that? Because you're not drawing near. In 1 Corinthians 5:17, if you talk about life, Paul says, "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come." When you keep coming to Christ you can rejoice as did the apostle Paul in Galatians 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." Because of this life we can echo Paul's prayer for the Ephesians in that book, chapter 3:20 when he said, "Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that is we ask or think, according to the power that works within us." We have to tap into that power. You do that when you keep coming in secret devotion to God. The power of the life of Christ is only available when we keep coming to Him.

Is this the testimony of your life? Or are you merely existing? Do you wake up in the middle of the night and feel a sense of joy in your heart because of all God has given you? Do you wake up in the morning with a song on your lips, saying, "Oh God, thank You for another opportunity to glorify You this day! Yes, many things in my life are very difficult and I'm struggling in significant ways, but thank You God that You are faithful. Lord, I want to keep coming to You this morning in prayer and in Your Word, so that I can experience more of the exhilarating joy of knowing You." Dear friends, all I can say is that you must keep coming to Christ. Don't let the things of this world distract you and rob you of the joy of fellowship with Him.

The old Puritan pastor George Downname said this, "Let us use worldly things as wise pilgrims do their staves and other necessaries convenient for their journey. So long as they help us forward in our way, let us make use of them, and accordingly esteem them. But if they become troublesome hindrances and cumbersome burdens, let us leave them behind us, or cast them away." Some of you are distracted by working way too many hours. Some of you are distracted by spending way too much time with your

hobbies. Some of you are distracted by the pleasures of this world, perhaps too much television. If you allow yourself to be distracted, you will rob yourself of the joy of life when we keep coming to Christ.

Notice the inspired apostle's words. He not only calls us to keep coming to Christ and keep coming to life, but thirdly, to keep coming to a spiritual house and a holy priesthood. This is a curious statement, especially in our culture. But here we see yet another amazing blessing of our salvation when we draw near to Christ for intimate fellowship. Notice verse 5, "you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood." What is a spiritual house? Certainly it's different than a material house. It would be different than the Old Testament tabernacle or temple, where the glorious presence of the divine Shekinah would manifest itself. But here we read of a spiritual house. Here we read of the abode of God under the new covenant, the spiritual house being the Church. In fact in 2 Corinthians 6:16 we read that we as saints are the temple of God. In 1 Corinthians 6:19 we read, "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you?"

Moreover, 1 Timothy 3:15 speaks of how we are to conduct ourselves "in the household of God which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth." The point is this: as we continue to draw near to Christ, to the living stone, we too are living stones that live in the presence of His spiritual abode. That's where we want to live, in the spiritual house. What a comfort this must have been to those persecuted saints in the first century that were being slaughtered for the cause of Christ. Peter is saying, keep coming to the house in secret devotion. Come and be built up as a spiritual house, for therein you will find joy and peace and comfort and hope.

But not only that, he says you "are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood." This is very curious for us in our modern age. Certainly the term priesthood has a lot of very unnecessary and perverted baggage that we can bring with it. For some when you think of the word priest you think of the apostate Roman Catholic system of Mary worship where you have priests that are supposedly mediators between man and God. Others might think of the sacerdotal system in the Old Testament where priests and Levites were mediators of the covenantal relationship between God and His people and they lead them in worship. But friends, this is a reference to something altogether different. This is a reference to the priesthood of the believers, whereby we all offer spiritual sacrifices. Not sacrifices of a redemptive nature as in the Old Testament, but sacrifices of gratitude and praise. We read of this in Romans 12:1 when we're told to "present our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God." This is summarized perfectly in Hebrews 13:15-16 where we read, "Through Him (Christ) then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God."

The question that I would pose to you is, how does God build us up into this spiritual house and this holy priesthood? I believe the answer lies in some of the stunning parallels of the characteristics of the Old Testament priests and the characteristics of New Testament saints, indeed our role as a holy priesthood. I believe there are six Old Testament parallels that flow out of several Old Testament passages. Let me give them to you briefly. What we're going to see is, even as the holy priests had certain things required of them and done to them, we have similar parallels as New Testament priests. They were: called, cleansed, clothed, consecrated, challenged and commanded.

Let me explain these briefly. I find these deeply convicting. First of all, the Old Testament priests were called. In Deuteronomy 7 and 8 we read how God sets His love on Israel and chose them simply because He loved them. In Exodus 28 we read that in His sovereignty God chose Aaron and his sons to

be His priests. He chose them out of the most sinful and least respected of all of the tribes of Israel, the tribe of Levi. Later we read how God chose His disciples in the New Testament. In John 15:16 the Lord says, “You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit.” Likewise, as the Old Testament priests and New Testament disciples were chosen by God, all believers have been chosen, have been elected by God’s sovereign grace in eternity past. Many passages tell us that. In Ephesians 1:4 we read that, “He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world.” In fact, like the sinful, ignoble tribe of Levi from which God chose His priests, He has likewise chosen us out of the least respected of the world. I think of 1 Corinthians 1:26 where we are reminded by the apostle Paul to “consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen.” I stand before you as a testimony of that text. Not very wise, not very noble, indeed quite foolish, quite weak.

So we see first of all that the Old Testament priests were called, and indeed we have been called as well. Likewise, they were cleansed, secondly. They were cleansed from sin. We read of this in Leviticus 8. There we have elaborate details of how God cleansed Aaron and his sons from sin. We have a discussion of how God washed them with water, and anointed them with oil and sprinkled the oil over the altar seven times, sprinkled the basins and the stands upon which they stood, and the utensils and everything in the tabernacle. Why? Because sin is to holiness what acid is to our human flesh. It is utterly reprehensible, it cannot be tolerated. First God had to cleanse His priests.

We read how God cleansed His disciples with the washing of regeneration and the symbolic washing of their feet in the upper room in John 13:8. Jesus told Peter, “If I do not wash you, you have no part of Me.” Remember how Peter then wanted all of his body to be washed, and the Lord had to explain that, the difference between washing in justification and sanctification. We as believers are cleansed by the blood of the lamb. We read about that in Hebrews 9:13-14 where it describes how “we who have been defiled” have been sanctified “by the blood of Christ” who “offered Himself without blemish to God” that He “might cleanse [our] conscience from dead works to serve the living God.” Indeed, as Paul said in Titus 2:14, “He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit.”

So, even as the priests were called and cleansed, we are called and cleansed. And thirdly, they were clothed as we are clothed. In Exodus 28 we can read a very vivid description of the priestly garments that God required of the priests—even their undergarments, called their linen breeches, that were to be worn from the loins to the thighs. It describes their sashes and their caps on their heads. All of these pieces of clothing would symbolize the enormous importance for these men to be called to purity, to holiness and to devotion to the One that they served. Likewise, we as believers have been clothed in the righteousness of Christ. Remember the parable of the wedding feast in Matthew 22. All of the guests were invited to the banquet but they had to wear the proper attire. The attire had to be what the king would give to them, all symbolic of the garments provided by the king, that of the Lord Jesus Christ and the garments of salvation. Somebody tried to get in wearing their own garments, and you know the nature of his demise. We read in Isaiah 61:10, “For He has clothed me with garments of salvation, He has wrapped me with a robe of righteousness.”

So we are called, cleansed and clothed, but like the priests we are also consecrated, which means set apart for spiritual service. In Leviticus 8 God commanded Moses to anoint Aaron and the sons with oil

and some of the blood that had been sprinkled on the altar, to sprinkle it all over their garments. In Exodus 30 we read of that anointing with a special oil and perfume mixture. It was a mixture that God Himself devised, ingredients that He formulated. Ingredients that could not even be made, much less used, for any other purpose than to anoint the priests and all the other items in the tabernacle. If that was violated it was punishable by death. In Exodus 30:29 we read, “You shall also consecrate them, that they may be most holy; whatever touches them shall be holy. You shall anoint Aaron and his sons, and consecrate them, that they may minister as priests to Me.”

All of this symbolized the holy purity and divine power of the priestly office. And likewise as believers, we are anointed by the purity and power of the Holy Spirit. In 1 John 2:20 it says that “you have an anointing from the Holy One.” Many times I hear people say, “So and so is just so anointed!” Folks, everybody that knows Christ is anointed. We’ve been anointed by the Holy Spirit. Because of this, like the priests under the old covenant, we have access into the very throne room of God. There is no need for some other mediator, some other priest. “There is only one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” we’re told in 1 Timothy 2:5. This is yet another reason to keep coming to Christ, to enjoy the unspeakable privilege we can have when we enter into His presence, because we have been consecrated.

So the priests were called, cleansed, clothed, consecrated and they were also challenged, as we are. Challenged to prepare their hearts with a secret devotion, to count the high cost and infinite value of following Christ. We read of this in Leviticus 8 where God commanded Moses to tell Aaron and his sons, according to verse 33, to “go outside the doorway of the tent of meeting for seven days, until the day that the period of your ordination is fulfilled; for he will ordain you through seven days.” In other words, ‘I want you to go out and contemplate in your heart the enormous responsibility and privilege of serving Me.’ I ask you, do you ever do that? Do you do that as you prepare your hearts to come to church on Sunday morning?

Ezra 7:10 tells us that Ezra “set his heart to study the law of the Lord and to practice it, and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel.” Even the apostle Paul did this in Galatians 1:15-17 where we read how Paul, when he was first converted, did not immediately go into ministry but rather went away to Arabia to prepare his heart for ministry. To prepare himself for the ministry to which he had been entrusted. Likewise, we as believers are to examine our hearts and count the cost of discipleship, to be willing to deny ourselves and take seriously our role as a priest that will offer up continual sacrifices. You must understand, Christianity is not a club. Christianity is a spiritual organism, it is the body of Christ to which we are united. It is the church, it is the household of God, the pillar and the support of truth. Therefore we would all do well to heed the words of the writer of Hebrews in chapter 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.”

The priests were called, cleansed, clothed, consecrated, challenged and finally they were commanded. They were commanded to live lives of obedience. We read this all throughout the Old Testament. Whenever they disobeyed the Lord the consequences were immediate and severe. Remember Nadab and Abihu, who offered strange fire before the Lord. They violated the way God wanted to be worshiped and God killed them. The Lord consumed them. Remember in 1 Samuel 4 with Hophni and Phinehas, the wicked sons of Eli, how they misused the ark of the covenant. As a result of that misuse, there were 30,000 foot soldiers of Israel that were killed by the Philistines. When the news of that came back to the camp, the Lord killed Hophni and Phinehas. Their father Eli, who, the text says was

ninety-eight years old and quite obese, when he heard the news he was so shocked he fell backwards, broke his neck and died. The point is, God is serious about His commandments to His priests. And we are His priests today. We need to be serious about it as well. We are commanded to be obedient to the Word. In fact, the Lord Jesus said in John 8:31, “If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine.”

So back to what Peter is saying. He’s already warned how we need to be obedient children, “not to be conformed to the former lusts which were ours in ignorance” as we learned in chapter 1:14. So he moves along and encourages us to keep coming to Christ, coming to life, coming to the spiritual house as a holy priesthood. Then he says “Why?” “...to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” This is my fourth point. We need to come to worship, friends. It’s part of being a New Testament priest. We have spiritual sacrifices of worship that are acceptable to Him. We don’t offer animal sacrifices that were of a redemptive nature in the Old Testament, but rather we offer spiritual sacrifices that are acceptable to Him. There are seven that are found in the New Testament. We’re to offer up our bodies, to “present our bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service.” Paul goes on to say in Romans 12:2 how we are “not to be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of our mind.” I ask, is that part of your sacrifice? With your body and mind?

We’re also, secondly, to sacrifice through our praise, the New Testament tells us. We are to extol the marvelous works and character of God, regardless of our situation. Is that the topic of your conversation around the water cooler? I hope it is, because when you do that you offer up a sacrifice that is acceptable to God, as a New Testament priest. We also offer up our good works, when we aid the poor, when we confront a sinning brother and help them bear their burden of sin. Also we are to sacrifice our possessions, the sharing of our material and financial resources to assist others who are in need. A fifth sacrifice that the Lord tells us is acceptable to Him is to offer up our sacrifices of converts. Friends, I ask you, do you have people that you’re witnessing to? People you’re praying for, people that you’ve targeted for salvation? What glory it gives to God when you offer up one with whom you have shared the gospel, one who by His grace has been saved.

We’re also to offer up our love. That sacrificial, selfless benevolence that we are to give to others, even sometimes to people we don’t like, even to our enemies. And finally, we are to offer up our prayers, a precious sacrifice to God, demonstrating our faith in His tender mercy and our confidence in His sovereign grace and care over our lives. So when we come to worship, we should offer up these acceptable sacrifices: our bodies, our praise, our good works, our possessions, our converts, our love, our prayers. Beloved, these are the marks of a mature saint that keeps coming to Christ in secret devotion, fulfilling their priestly role, offering up those spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God. I challenge you to measure your life against these divine standards. May I encourage everyone who names the name of Christ to keep coming into His glorious presence, and revel in the goodness and glory of God.

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