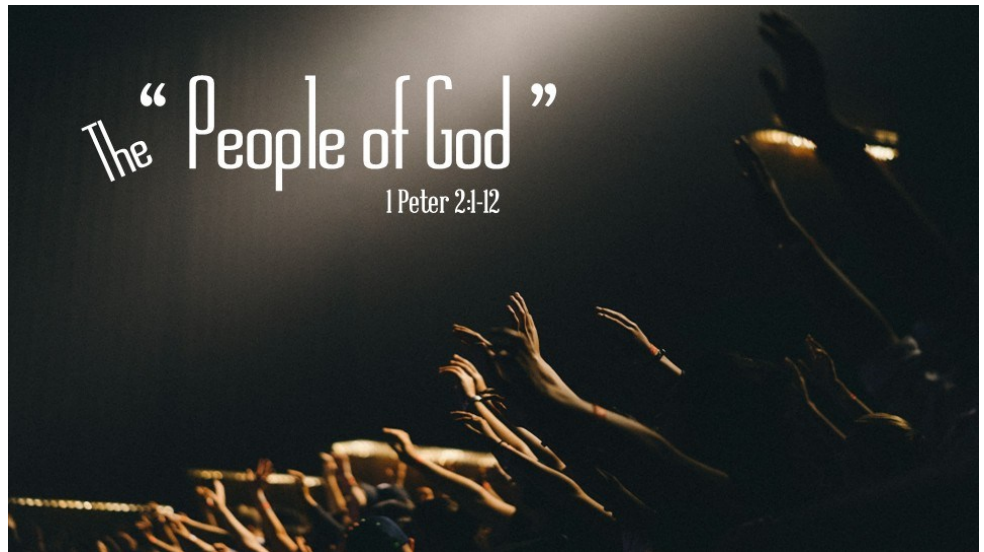


The “People of God”

1 Peter 2:1-12

by Pastor Tim Dodson
at Believers City Church
in Menomonie, Wis
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1 Peter 2:1-12 Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit,

hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, 2 as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, 3 if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious. 4 Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, 5 you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. 6 Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture, "Behold, I lay in Zion A chief cornerstone, elect, precious, And he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame." 7 Therefore, to you who believe, He is precious; but to those who are disobedient, "The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone," 8 and "A stone of stumbling And a rock of offense." They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed. 9 But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; 10 who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy. 11 Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, 12 having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.

In verse 23 of the last chapter, Peter spoke of "*having been born again, and that, by an incorruptible seed*" ...and begins here in chapter 2 with "therefore..." The idea therein is "now that I have been born again, then..." and he moves on to the actions, the behavior, the characteristics, of such a person that has indeed been "born again." Peter's point thus far...and really throughout this letter, is that the nature of a reborn individual has been...must be...naturally transformed by the event and action of redemption. This is the matter of moving beyond the salvation *experience* and into the salvation *dynamic*. Indeed while the salvation experience may occur...completely and forever in a moment of time, the salvation dynamic is experienced over a lifetime as we grow more and more into the image of God. However...with that being said...to live our lives in a static pattern and see no real growth and maturing...is more than disconcerting! It should trouble us a great deal! Paul says in 2 Corinthians 13:5 "*Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?*"

Peter begins this scriptural section with the word "therefore," or, *in light of this previous chapter...* "because we have been born again," we are to "get rid of all evil behavior." Once again we are presented with a relational dynamic in our faith...a responsibility and actionable impact of making direct contact with the most powerful force and entity in the universe. There is no way that won't leave a mark! We can sit back and wait for God to

do these things in us ...things that apparently, we don't really want to do, for if we did we would race to embrace them...or, we can take a deep breath and engage these things while filled with the Spirit presence of God. But clearly Peter is telling the reader; **you** get rid of these behaviors. Certainly the Holy Spirit's involvement and empowerment is more than just implied here, but definitely so is the directive to each of us to "step up to the plate" and move on these behaviors and negative *ungodly* actions in our lives! It is to read as follows; "...because you have been born again, ...**you** get rid of all these evil behaviors..."

No such discipline is being asked of the unredeemed, but it is certainly clear that when one IS redeemed, you **are** and **will** bear ownership and assume the responsibilities of a Christ redeemed living! We would have to cut out vast segments of scripture if we attempted to rule out our eventual and critical personal participation in all of this. Call it what you want...discipline, effort, work...all the words which can tend to universally cause us to bristle, yet we clearly and repeatedly find them all in scripture.

We are to put away from ourselves "*all deceit, hypocrisy, jealousy, and all unkind speech.*" Hmmm! If only we were to find such evidenced in even a substantial percentage of the greater church! But my experience as a pastor all these years has led me to come to see this hill we are to climb as the true battle ground! People are coming to Jesus...they like those in John 6...wherein as Jesus fed the multitude, they indeed wanted a piece of that action. However, once Jesus started doling out the directives and the life changes...preaching the "hard stuff," most everyone clamored for the doors and so many still do. Some churches are focused on those who believe themselves to be still connected to God but have given up on church...a premise fraught with scriptural problems. I'm concerned rather for those who are still in church but have effectively given up on God, and apparently so is Peter in this letter.

There are those that conveniently lay the whole responsibility of our faithful living at the feet of Christ, chanting the mantra of the modern "Jesus-lite" church: "it's all Jesus! He does it all!" Yes, Jesus does all the redemptive work and we cannot add to it. But let's not forget that this Christianity thing is designed to be a **relationship**. It is something we **live out** with Christ. We are to have an active and personal participation through all of it! And we...if we have really been born again, are transformed and impassioned toward our new Redeemer and Lord. This relationship is a two-way flow of love and interactive effort. What we do we do because we are now compelled. We are compelled because we are Spirit-filled. If we are not so motivated, it is because we are not in love and likely not therefore Spirit-filled. I say that because *HE* does not fail nor fall short. But we...in our natural state...*DO* fall short! Salvation...and the Holy Spirit... is not an airbag...designed to catch us in times of crisis. If we drive crazy and ignore the rules of the road, there will eventually come a time wherein He simply will not catch you and there is probably going to be some blood! You do your part, and He will do His...which is to make up the shortcomings of yours! That's true grace! Again, this thing is a relationship. A bond. A friendship. A marriage. A covenant agreement. A relational union between us and God.

Certainly we must be very careful in this. For we know that we can, at least for a time and in the power of our own strength, evoke some level of personal 'behavior modification.' I have seen it countless times. We can, through our own strength alone, carry on in moral fortitude, in a "faux-faith." We can do it pretty convincingly too, and we can do it for a surprisingly long time! In fact, much longer than anyone would naturally think! But absent of that relationship with God there will come that eventual failure on some level, if only in the obvious lack of peace, growth, and/or real 'fruit' of spiritual authentication. Since we rarely have the audacity to blame Christ Himself for the lack of mojo, we inevitably blame others. Often our church, and often we eventually do so in scathing manner. What Jesus brought us is much more than just an adjustment in manners and a location

change for our Sunday mornings. Salvation is rather a complete new person, a new nature, a new beginning, ...a new birth.

Upon that rebirth, we essentially “begin again.” We “reboot.” We are babies once more, with all of the cuteness and all of the smelly diapers. We learn and we grow in much of our new Christian life, just as a child must learn to feed himself, walk without falling, ride a bike, tie his shoes and spell his name. The spiritual help is out there, as well as the tools and structural assistance around us, but at some point that child must actually and personally exert effort. He or she must actually act. He has to move. He has to *try*. Or mommy and daddy will be feeding him in a high chair, and tying his shoes for him his whole life.

As we read in chapter 1, we know that these believers had been enduring a great deal of trials and suffering from “enemies” that were tangible, and *out there*, but Peter begins now to instruct them on dealing with the intangible and very real enemies that were *inside*. Those are the enemies that are so often ignored or postponed in times of trial and heightened persecution. Despite all these people were under, Peter was still calling upon these believers to reject sin...to feed on God’s Word, and to understand, accept, and take their place in God’s greater plan for His church and His kingdom. To step up, lean in, and move via the Spirits power...wherein most of all, they *obey*.

Peter was telling them to not just look "out there" at the affront of the enemy but to look inside...to turn their attention to what was IN them. Because those other battles... as well as the enemy himself... was out of their personal control and ultimately in God's arena alone. Jesus is our defense in those matters and sovereign over all such attacks. That does not mean we should ignore the education and understanding of spiritual warfare and the onslaught of the enemy. Yet truth-be-told, it is the personal 'demons' individually inside each us that pose the greatest treat. They are the real predators that can bring us down quicker than anything and anyone else.

The question to honestly ask ourselves today is, "what is our diet?" Am I attempting to live off of “worldly junk food?” The reality is that many of us are being "filled" with the material things of the world and all of its spurious junk food, its sweet and empty calories, and heart and artery clogging fat. These things may taste good, but they also will slowly kill you. That’s what sin does, I guess. And sometimes so slow it is nearly imperceptible.

"if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious." If truly you have, there should be all sorts of crazy things happening in your world, one of which is a great motivation to rid yourselves of the issues that ruin your spiritual appetite. Psalms 34:8 likely inspired Peter’s words saying *"Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good; Blessed is the man who trusts in Him!"* One of the ways we know we have experienced such is that we quickly begin to crave that which we have "tasted." In doing so, we can find ourselves in some crazy places and crazy situations but we are there because that is where Jesus is and we want to be with Him and do what He is doing!

There used to be this little hole-in-the-wall joint up in North Minneapolis that cooked up Cajun wings. My buddy and I would go up there late at night...into a neighborhood we very likely shouldn’t have been roaming around in at night, all in order to get those wings. We probably were risking our very lives, but man they were SO good. Is that what Jesus and His Word does for you? Do you crave it? Do you desire His present power and manifest so much to let it drag you off into some crazy and inexplicable situations? Because that is the passionate life that Jesus wants to live out with you.

Have you “tasted that the Lord is gracious?” The NLT renders 1 John 2:17 as "And this world is fading away, along with everything that people crave." Jesus desires that you lose your taste for the cheap and passing trifles of this world. Luther once said, "Whosoever has not tasted the word... to him it is not sweet (if it) has not

reached the heart; but to them who have experienced it, who with the heart believe, '*Christ has been sent for me and is become my own: my miseries are His, and His life mine,*' ...it tastes sweet."

Robert Leighton writes....

Our natural desire for food arises principally from its necessity for the nourishment of our bodies. In addition to this there is a sweetness and pleasantness as we eat it that serves to sharpen our desire, and nature has given it to us for this purpose. Thus God's children, in their spiritual life, naturally desire the means of their nourishment and growth, as in this life we are always in a growing state. In addition, there is a spiritual delight and sweetness in the Word, for it reveals God, and this adds to their desire and stirs up their appetite for it. By the Word we grow, and in the Word we taste the graciousness of God.

While Christ indeed overwhelms His chosen with His love and His direct intervention, there still must come a response on our part. A response that is lived out in action. Not merely a *deciding for* Him, but a *coming to* Him. Not merely a *decision* for Him, but a *surrender to Him*. A *surrender of one's life*. That means we go where He is. We follow Him where he leads. We agree with Him, and stand with Him, and follow Him as our Lord and Master. We become the "people of God" and He actually expects us to look like it and act like it.

How many of us are struggling today because we are still looking for the loving Jesus to come to us and comfort us where we are and in whatever situation we find ourselves? So often it never seems to occur to us that God might actually want to get us out of the situation we are in! In fact, that is a certainty when we come to Christ. As the months turn to years, the pressure to move out of our worldly pit will increase and sooner or later something must give: you or your relationship with God.

He wants us to move out of the world we were living in and into a world HE is living in. The reality of maturing in Christ is that there is a conscious and purposeful departure from our old residence and into the new one. Yet how many of us want Jesus and the world that we love and desire for ourselves in our flesh? We just want to add Jesus to the life we already have! But that's not rebirth...that's not the transformation of salvation.

These to whom Peter is writing are believers who were suffering in the face of persecution and trials. So Peter begins by stating that the answer was to move toward Jesus. That of course will naturally mean a 'closer scrutiny and direction.' We cannot grow up in our faith by staying put in the life we have always lived. Peter paints a picture of a house that is being built by Christ, in which we are the stones...the 'living stones.' Such a picture of course portrays the beautiful picture of the body of Christ...the church!

I have been up close and touched ancient castles in Europe. Construction that has lasted for hundreds, *if not thousands* of years. Walls built for strength, protection, and longevity. Walls made of rocks that together with other rocks create an awesome defense and a majestic building. But alone...those rocks are just one rock laying out in a field someplace. No value. No memorable purpose. No unified and timeless strength. Just 'in the way' and 'taking up space.'

There is a famous story from Sparta. A Spartan king boasted to a visiting monarch about the walls of Sparta. The visiting monarch looked around and could see no walls. He said to the Spartan king, "Where are these walls about which you boast so much?" His host pointed at his bodyguard of magnificent troops. "These," he said, "are the walls of Sparta, every man a brick." The point is clear. So long as a brick lies by itself it is useless; it becomes of use only when it is incorporated into a building. So it is with the individual Christian. To realize his destiny he must not remain alone, but must be built into the fabric of the Church. (www.preceptaustin.org)

Verse 8 tells the story: "*they stumble, being disobedient to the Word...*". When we attempt to "go it alone" we are being disobedient to God's Word. It is just a flagrant act of pride on our part to think we need no one and have no responsibility to others in the body...in the wall of God's house.

Back in chapter 1 of this letter Peter had directed us to reject the desires of our old life (1Pe 1:14) and called upon us to pursue a holy walk (1Pe 1:15-16). We cannot ignore this simple premise...that holiness is a attribute which must characterize our new life in Christ, for it is the proof that we indeed walk in His Spirit. We are reminded repeatedly throughout scripture that if there is not an obvious difference in your behavior after your profession of Christ as your Savior, then you need to honestly and sincerely look to your heart as to whether you have ever truly tasted of God's grace. Holy behavior will be the general direction of your life if you are truly in Christ. Indeed, "direction" does not mean "perfection." We all "blow it." Some days worse than others. But when the Spirit convicts us, He also enables us to get back up spiritually speaking, and to keep moving forward. If you do not get up, then what does that say? It is so important to take a "spiritual inventory" of your life on a regular basis." You can't afford not to do this, for eternity...*your forever*, is at stake!

It seems like it would be a 'no-brainer', but apparently it needs to be said: "You cannot stay the same once you have become a born-again Christian." Because factually you ***will*** not." The power of the Spirit of God that is now a very part of you in your reborn state is going to change you. It is an absolute fact. We cannot with any shred of credibility claim we are reborn and remain the same! Verse 5 says we are to "offer up spiritual sacrifices." A sacrifice is something that costs...something of value that we offer up to God. Romans 12:1 says these sacrifices are our literal bodies. Romans 13:15 says they are also our worship and our thanks. Philippians 4:18 says they are also acts of love. But one thing is for sure, they are all issues of value...things I give to God when my flesh wants to keep them for myself. Things like our time, our finances, our service, and onward into our pride, our self-centeredness, my pleasures, and my wants.

It's all 'heating up' out there today. Those who stood on the fringes of the faith are falling away, and it is only going to get worse. Marginal Christianity, if it ever existed in any form, is all but gone now. There is no middle ground, no quiet spiritual rest areas, no "having your cake and eating it too." We are quite simply being called to "abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul," because we are supposed to be "sojourners"...just folks passing through here, and yet so many folks claiming faith have roots that are deep into this world. So deep, that those roots are anchoring them to that world and keeping them from being a real part of God's house...keeping them from being a part of the "great wall of God's kingdom." Peter stops short of referring to these things blatantly as "sins" and we need to realize that a lot of the things that "war against our souls" are not biblical sin but simply weights that continually pull us down and keep us 'out of the game.' Peter is passionately calling us today. He says he is "begging" us...

I think back to late 2014 when ISIS released the video of them beheading the captured journalist Steven Sotloff. At his memorial service, Sotloff himself spoke via a letter smuggled out of captivity before his death. "Please know I'm OK," said Sotloff in the letter. "Live your life to the fullest...Everyone has two lives. The second one begins when you realize you only have one."

Only **one**...