

BEING BUILT INTO A SPIRITUAL HOUSE

1 Peter 2: 4-5

Please review this week's catechism question.

INTRODUCTION

In your experience what have been some of the benefits of being involved in a local church? What have been some of the disappointments?

What would you say are the main reasons that you have the level of involvement you have in this local church?

The benefits of involvement in a local church do not often live up to the perceived billing it receives in the NT. Most people envision a community where God is experientially present, where significant work is being done and where loving relationships are the norm, not the exception. We need regular reminders of God's view of the church and of what the church actually is. We have in 1 Peter 2:4-5 one of the most powerful descriptions in the NT of the grandeur of the church. It is our aim in this study to understand and to rejoice in God's work of building his church.

STUDY

1. How does v. 5 show that God is the one who is building the church?

In v. 4 Peter identifies the building material that God is using, the "living stones". All those who are coming to Christ as the living stone "are being built" into the church, God's spiritual house. That verb, "are being built", is a present tense passive verb. If you would have been here Labor Day weekend last fall and watched as a crew of our members put the roof on the building you might have described what you were observing in this way, "The shingles are being placed on the roof." Or one rainy and cold Saturday in November you could have been here watching as "the siding was being attached to the

building." Shingles and pieces of siding do not attach themselves to the building. We all know that the way the shingles got on the roof is that people put them there. Stones, even living ones, do not add themselves to the church. God himself is building us into his spiritual house, his church. He is the architect, the general contractor and the laborer who builds his church. He is the one who finds the stones and makes them fit for his house and then makes them fit into his house.

2. How does Paul's description of the origin of the church in Ephesians 2:19-21 complement and confirm what Peter says here?

This is essentially the same metaphor. We, who are "in Christ" are being built on Christ as the cornerstone and into a temple, a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

3. How do the following verses from 1 Peter show that our being added to God's church is his work? To ask it another way, how do we become living stones who are being built into a spiritual house?

- 1 Peter 1:1 *We, the living stones, are identified as God's elect or "chosen ones". God is the one who chooses which stones he is going to use in his building. We don't decide to be added to this building, God does.*
- 1 Peter 1:2 *This emphasizes the act of choosing and gives us further information about God's act. He chose us in accordance with his foreknowledge. Foreknowledge refers to God's decision in eternity past to love a particular group of people. It does not refer to bare cognition or knowing facts but to knowing in a relational sense, in a loving way in advance particular people. Like the man who determines to love a woman and then pursues her in order to marry her out of his love for her. This is the same thing Paul says in Ephesians 1:4-5. In addition, Peter tells us that it was the sanctifying work of the H.S. that accomplished this choosing. The decision to choose us in love was fulfilled at a particular point in time by the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit (See John 3: 1-8).*

- 1 Peter 1:3 *God, out of his mercy, his kindness to poor miserable sinners makes us alive. He gives us new birth into a living hope. We are made “living” stones by this new birth.*
- 1 Peter 1:18-19 *Here the work of the Son of God is emphasized. We are redeemed from the deadness of our former lives by means of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. It is his death that pays our debt and sets us free from the slavery of sin, death and the law so that we are God’s redeemed people.*
- 1 Peter 1:23-25 *Here the instrument of our new birth is the eternal word of God. That same word that spoke into the darkness and created light and life out of nothing, speaks into the darkness and deadness of our hearts and gives us light and life. This word that powerfully creates new life is the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

The point here is that God is the one who makes us fit for being a part of his spiritual house and then fits us into that spiritual house. It is a work of grace. It is not our work. He gets all the credit, not us.

4. In vv. 3-4, using two different metaphors, Peter gives us two of the characteristics of every “living stone”. What are they?

In 2:3, Peter says that everyone who belongs to God has “tasted that the Lord is good”. There was a point in time that every person who is now a living stone had no taste for Jesus. Jesus was not a part of his or her diet. Humans by nature “eat” all kinds of things but Jesus sits on the shelf like a jar of unfamiliar and distasteful food until someone begins to tell us that we ought to try him. Eventually, by a work of God’s gracious Holy Spirit, we give in and take a taste of him and we discover he is nutritious and delightful. We discover that this one who was completely irrelevant to our happiness and our spiritual health is now the central part of our diet. We discover that he is very good. How do you respond when you try a new food and find it to be delightful? Women, what do you do when you have dinner at someone else’s home and eat a dish you’ve never eaten before and it’s absolutely marvelous? You get the recipe and you make it at your house. You make it a part of your diet. When we discover a food that is good, we eat it again and again, not just once.

Look at the difference in the tenses of the verbs between vv. 3 & 4. “Tasted” is past tense and “come” is present tense. If you are a “living stone”, at a point in time you tasted the Lord and found him to be good. Now, you keep coming to him because you delight to do so. The way you know you are a Christian is not by looking back in your life and pointing to an experience you had in the past but by looking at your life now. Are you each day coming to Christ as your savior and your redeemer? Is he the central part of your diet? Is it the chief happiness of your life to know and trust and love him?

5. What are the things that Peter tells us about Jesus in v. 4 (compare with v. 6) and why does he tell us these things?

The metaphor describing Christ has changed between vv. 3 & 4. In v. 3 Jesus is a food we discover is good, in v. 4 he is a living stone that we come to. As v. 6 says, he is the cornerstone, the foundation rock. We are told two things about Jesus in v. 4. First, mankind in general rejects Jesus as central to life. Most human beings when they are looking for stones to build their life with do not find Jesus to be the necessary cornerstone, the main building block of life. The word for reject that is used here means that something is examined and found to be lacking and so tossed aside. Like when you go to the lumberyard to buy wood for a project and you search through the stack of 2 x 4’s, tossing aside the ones that are crooked and keeping the ones that are straight. Most humans find Jesus to be irrelevant to life. He’s like one of the crooked 2x4’s that you toss aside. But, in contrast to natural men, God sees Jesus as the choice and precious stone in the building. Look at v. 6. God is building his church and when he begins the project and looks around for the best stone to use as the cornerstone he picks Jesus. The cornerstone in a building is the most important stone. If you start a building wrong, even a little bit, by the time you get finished, nothing fits together, the whole thing is wrong.

There are two things that are true of every living stone. First, every living stone is placed by God into his house, his church. The idea that you can be a Christian and not be part of a church is one of the greatest lies Satan has persuaded millions of people in America to believe. It is a dangerous deception to believe that you can be a Christian and not be part of a local church. Second, every living stone that God puts in his house has the same opinion of Jesus that he does. If you are a living stone, Jesus isn’t just a person of passing interest to you. He is the most fascinating, most desirable,

most necessary person in your life. He is your life. You feel about him the same way that God the Father feels about him. Those who are being built into a spiritual house have examined all the potential things to build life upon and have discovered that the only thing that is trustworthy is Jesus. Those whom God builds upon the cornerstone of Jesus are those who have discovered that Jesus is the cornerstone of their lives.

6. How would you describe your opinion of and relation to Jesus in light of these things?

7. According to v. 5 what is the purpose of God's building us into a spiritual house?

In the middle of v. 5 Peter changes his metaphor again. He says that God is building us, these living stones, into a spiritual house "to be a holy priesthood." Not only are we the stones that make up the walls of his house but we are also the priests who serve in his house. God makes us into his spiritual house so that we can be priests in his house, his temple for the purpose of offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

8. What do we learn about ourselves by Peter saying that every Christian is a priest, like the priests in the OT?

The priests in the OT were the ones set apart in Israel to take care of the temple, to offer the sacrifices and prayers to God that he required, to pray to and praise God and to teach men about God and what he requires. Peter says that all of us are priests. There is not a special class of people any longer who are different than everyone else in their access to God, their service to God, and their necessity in God's work. We don't all have the same functions, just like all the priests in the OT didn't have the same jobs. However, all of us share equally in the value of our labor and contribution to the worship and service of God and man. All of us engage in the work of offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

9. What are the "spiritual sacrifices" we offer to God? See Romans 12:1, Philippians 2:17 & 4:18, Romans 15:16, 31, 2 Cor. 8:12, Heb. 13:15 & 1 Peter 4:7-11 for examples.

The spiritual sacrifices we offer to God are all those attitudes, thoughts, words and actions that we have or do by faith in Jesus. These sacrifices are

not just the things we do in or for our local church. It is our whole life, all of our time, abilities, resources, words and actions lived by faith in Christ and to his glory. It includes words and songs of thanksgiving and praise. It includes acts of kindness and mercy and help given to others, especially to other Christians. It is financial gifts for the support of missionaries, pastors and the work of the church. It includes the meals we eat and the leisure time we enjoy. It includes changing diapers and mowing the lawn. It includes preaching and teaching the gospel in every way that the gospel is shared. It is words of encouragement and warning and correction and comfort to one another. It is the forgiveness and acceptance we offer to one another because we have been forgiven and accepted by God. It is being a loving husband, a respectful wife, an obedient child, a fair employer, a hard working employee. It includes the work we engage in to help the poor and preach the gospel as a church. There is no part of our life together that is not included in these spiritual sacrifices that are acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

10. Why does Peter tell us that our sacrifices are acceptable to God through Jesus Christ?

All of our "sacrifices" are acceptable because of Christ's sacrifice, not because they have intrinsic value in themselves. Our lives and all that we do, think and say are not acceptable to God because of who we are but because of who Jesus is and what he has done. Our lives and all the fruit that comes from our living is only acceptable to God because of Christ's life and death. Therefore, the main thing is not our subjective feelings or intentions, because they are always a mixture of good and bad, but that we are in Christ. The reason God smiles upon us and is pleased with our living is because he is pleased with his Son.

11. How would it change the way you do your work and the way you feel about your work, whatever it is, if you were to think of it all as "spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ?"

12. What are some ways this passage has affected your view of the church and your involvement in it?