

Sermon Title: Spiritual Sacrifices
Scripture Text: 1 Peter 2:5 (1 Peter #10)

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 5-29-16

Come with me once again as we return to First Peter this morning.

We have begun to see a pattern in this letter from Peter. As a true and genuinely caring "shepherd" of "the flock of God" (1 Pet. 5:2), Peter knows what you need in order to survive and thrive in a world which is hostile to your Lord and hostile to all those who trust in Him and represent Him and speak His truth (Jn. 15:18-19; cf. Gal. 3:29; 1 Pet. 5:8; 1 Jn. 5:19; Rev. 12:17). Peter wrote to people who were under *severe* persecution for their faith, and he knows what they needed.

Above all, what you need to know is that you have "riches" in "Christ" (Eph. 3:8; Col. 1:27). You need to know what you have by virtue of your faith in Christ. Contrary to popular opinion these days—which says that Bible doctrine is irrelevant—the truth is *exactly* the opposite. You need to know, above all, what your riches are in Christ. And so, Peter began his book to persecuted people by telling you what you have in Christ; it is amazing:

You are "elect" (Rom. 8:33)—that means you were "chosen in Him before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:4; cf. 1 Pet. 1:1).

You are "foreknown" (Rom. 8:29; cf. 1 Pet. 1:2)—that means that "God the Father" predetermined that you would be His child (Jn.17:6; Eph. 1:5).

Because you have come to Christ, you have been "sanctified" by the "work of the Holy Spirit" (1 Pet. 1:2; cf. 2 Thess. 2:13).

It says that you "obey Jesus Christ" if you belong to Him (1 Pet. 1:2; cf. 1 Jn. 2:4).

He says that you have been "sprinkled with His blood" (1 Pet. 1:2; cf. Rev. 7:14)—that is built upon the imagery of the Old Testament sacrifices, where not until the blood was sprinkled on the altar was the benefit of that sacrifice actually applied on behalf of the worshipper (e.g., Ex. 24:6; Lev. 1:5). Christ's "blood" has been "sprinkled" on your account (1 Cor. 5:7; Col. 1:20, 22).

Therefore, you "stand" in "grace" and "peace" (Rom. 5:1-2), and so Peter prays that they will be "multiplied to you" (1 Pet. 1:2).

He tells you that "God the Father" has "caused [you] to be born again" if you are in Christ (1 Pet. 1:3; cf. Jn. 1:13; 3:3, 5; Titus 3:5).

Therefore, you now have "a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 1:3; cf. Rom. 5:2; 8:24-25; Col. 1:27; Heb. 6:19).

And because of that "living hope," you have an "imperishable and undefiled inheritance" (1 Pet. 1:4; cf. Ps. 37:28; Prov. 24:14; Matt. 6:20; Jn. 6:37; Eph. 1:14; 2 Tim. 4:8, 18). He tells you that that "inheritance" is "reserved in heaven for you" (1 Pet. 1:4; cf. Jn. 6:39; Rom. 8:30)—it is engraved with your serial number, if you will (Lk. 10:20; Rev. 17:8; 20:15); nobody else can take your inheritance from you (Prov. 23:18; 24:14).

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He tells you that you are "are protected by the power of God" all the way to the end, before you receive that inheritance (1 Pet. 1:5; cf. Jn. 10:27-29; 17:11, 15; 1 Cor. 1:8; Phil. 1:6; Jer. 32:40).

And he says that in the meantime, you can "greatly rejoice" in *all* of that, despite the "various trials" that you face in this world (1 Pet. 1:6; cf. Ps. 34:19; Jn. 16:33; Acts 14:22; Rom. 5:3; Jas. 1:2).

And he tells you that God is refining your "faith" through this fiery "testing" that is going on (1 Pet. 1:7; Job 23:10; Ps. 66:10; Is. 48:10; Zech. 13:9; Mal. 3:3; Jas. 1:3-4).

And then at the end of Verse 12, he explains that this is the fulfillment of God's promises from all the "ages" past (Titus 1:2; cf. 1 Pet. 1:20; Acts 15:18).

Peter says *all of that* before he tells you anything that *you* have to do! *Only* after he has laid that kind of a foundation does he *then* give you commands; and we have seen a series of four of them, starting at Chapter 1, Verse 13.

The first command is: "Fix you're your hope" on all that is to come by "preparing your minds for action" by deciding to live "holy" because God is "holy" (vss. 15-16; cf. Matt. 5:48). So, "Arrange your mind around these things"—that is where it begins.

The second command: Therefore, live in the proper "fear" of God (Deut. 6:2; 8:6; 13:4) because of all that He has done for you in Christ (vs. 17; cf. Ps. 116:12; 103:2; Rom. 12:1; 1 Cor. 6:20; 2 Cor. 5:14-15; 7:1; Gal. 2:20).

Chapter 1 wraps up with the third command: to stretch yourself to the uttermost to "ferverently love one another from the heart" (vs. 22; cf. 1 Thess. 4:9-10), because "you have been born again...through the living and enduring word of God" (vs. 23; cf. Matt. 5:18; 24:35; Jn. 5:24; 6:63; 15:3; Rom.10:17; 2 Tim. 3:15; Heb. 4:12). So, "stretch yourself"—that's what "ferverent" means: "stretching out" to the fullest possible extent.

And then, as we got to the beginning of Chapter 2—where there is a rather unfortunate chapter break—we were greeted with the command to "long for the pure milk of the word" as fervently as "newborn babies" long for mother's milk (vs. 2). That command is for every Christian (Matt. 4:4; Col. 3:16). It is for all who have "tasted the kindness of the Lord" (vs. 3), says Peter. And he says that that requires you to be willing to put aside the sins that you know would hinder your fellowship with the Lord and with His people (vs. 1).

So the pattern is established: *First*, you need to know what you have in Christ (e.g., Eph. 1:3; 2 Pet. 1:3); *then*, you need to be exhorted to act in light of it (e.g., 2 Cor. 7:1).

Last time, we began what is a fresh cycle of explaining "riches" that are yours in Christ. In Chapter 2, Verses 4 through 10, again there are no commands now for seven verses, but a review of *great privileges* that are ours in Christ. This is what you are privileged to have in Him.

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Last time, even though the paragraph is seven verses long, we made it all the way through a verse and a half. Today we are going to stretch that out and include the *other* half of the verse where we stopped. We began a survey of a list of at least ten ways to describe a Christian, and we only got started; we are going to inch along a little bit further today; and then next time, Lord willing, we are going to wrap it all up, and you will see this whole paragraph in its fullness.

So the whole paragraph is Chapter 2, Verses 4 through 10, but the portion we are looking at today is Verses 4 and 5. It says: "And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is 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." (NASB-1995—and throughout, unless otherwise noted)

Now, it all begins with what is described by that phrase "coming to Him." That means that by God's grace, you have the privilege to come—*not only* in the sense of first coming to Him for salvation, crying out to Him to forgive you and accept you and declare you righteous (Lk. 18:13; Rom. 4:3-5); but you have the privilege to come, as it were—as the grammar implies here: You can come face to face with the glorious Jesus Christ through His Word, by His Spirit, every day (2 Cor. 3:18). You have the privilege to always be "coming to Him."

And notice then that Christ is described as "a living stone" (vs. 4). And I pointed out to you last time what a marvelous word picture that is by way of "oxymoron"—a "stone" is the epitome of lifelessness (e.g., Ezek. 11:19; Hab. 2:19). But Jesus conquered death (Jn. 10:17-18), and He "lives...forevermore" (Rev. 1:18, NKJV), and therefore He is the "*living* stone." He was "rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God" (vs. 4).

And then, look at the next description of you as a Christian: We come as "living stones." Jesus not only conquered death, He not only "lives forevermore," He also *gives* that same quality of life! (Jn. 10:28; 14:19). He *gives* "eternal life" to all who will come by faith to receive it as a "free gift" (Rom. 6:23), and so *we become* "living stones"!

Now, what are you going to do if you have a bunch of live rocks? Well, let's build a "spiritual house" (vs. 5). That's what it says. God's eternal plan includes all of us in Christ "being built up as a spiritual house"; it is an ongoing process (Matt. 16:18; Acts 2:47; 5:14; Col. 1:6). Each individual Christian is part of God's design for this house (Eph. 4:16), which is His "church" (Col. 1:18, 24; cf. Eph. 1:22-23). It is not a physical place; it is "a spiritual house." Pulsating with the life of the risen Lord, this house is the ever growing and changing dynamic, vibrant process under construction to build the church, "the body of Christ" (Eph. 4:12).

Last week, we got to this point, and I said something off the cuff that just seemed brilliant to me at the moment. But you know that saying: Don't let your mind wander. It's too little to be out on its own." I let mine get away for a second there, and I put two and two together and got nine. I said that as "living stones" in this "spiritual house," not only do

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we grow—and we grow together and we fit together—but I said, "Sometimes an individual stone would get a promotion and go on to be with the Lord," and I had kind of this mental picture of the wall with the stones, and one is taken out and the others grow together, and something fills in. Well, it *is* true that it is a wonderful thing to be "promoted" out of this world (Lk. 23:43; Phil. 1:22-23; Heb., 12:23); and that can, indeed, happen to you: We can shed this "earthly tent" and be "with the Lord" (2 Cor. 5:1, 8), and that is truly a wonderful thing.

But as I thought about it more, I realized: I mixed together the idea of promotion to be with Christ—I wove that into the metaphor of the living and growing Church, the "spiritual house" which is "the body of Christ"—but I think, to stick with the logic of this metaphor: To go and be with the Lord *does not remove you* from the "spiritual house." You don't *cease* to be part of the Church. I apologize for saying something that might make it sound as if I think that is true.

You see, Christ Himself—who is *the* "living stone"—He is the "chief cornerstone" (Ps. 118:22; Matt. 21:42; Acts 4:11), so He is part of the "foundation" (1 Cor. 3:11). The "apostles and prophets" of the first century—they *are* "the foundation," and we are "built" upon their "foundation" (Eph. 2:20), so *they* are ongoing crucial parts of the "spiritual house," and there is no doubt that we stand on the shoulders not only of the "apostles and prophets" but all the saints who have gone before us in the faith.

The next description of who you are in Christ is fantastic. I could not get past this one without lingering and showing it to you, and I don't think you are going to feel gypped for us not making a lot of forward progress when you see what is here.

You see, you share the life of the "living stone," Jesus Christ; so He has made us "living stones," building us into "a spiritual house," into a—look at the text—"a holy priesthood." So your duty is to "offer up"—look at the text—"spiritual sacrifices." What is that about? What are those sacrifices?

So, here is where we are going. We are just going to look at part of Verse 5:

Number 1: We Are "A Holy Priesthood"
Number 2: To "Offer Spiritual Sacrifices"
Number 3: "Acceptable To God"

We Are "A Holy Priesthood."

Look what it says there: "You also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood." This is going to blow your socks off when you understand all that this means.

To begin, notice the way this sentence is framed: It is clear that the "holy priesthood" consists of the *entire* "spiritual house" which is comprised of *all* the "living stones." In other words: In Christ, *you are a priest*.

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If you have ever studied much of church history, you probably know that one of the great big deals of the Protestant Reformation was acknowledging that the Bible teaches the "Universal Priesthood of Believers."

When Peter uses a word like "priest," he knows full well what he means by it. And he understands the background of the word from the Old Testament and from the Old Covenant sacrificial system. The "priest" was the one who stood between God and man. If you were an Old Testament believer, you had to bring your sacrifices to the priest for them to be offered to God (Lev. 1:9).

But that is not the case under the New Covenant. Because of what the "great high priest" did "once for all" (Heb. 4:14; 7:27; 9:12; 10:10; 1 Pet. 3:18), there is now *no living human* between you and God (Heb. 4:16). We like to say it this way: You have a *personal relationship* with God through Jesus Christ. It is "personal" in that it is not mediated by anything (Heb. 10:19-20).

So, in the Church, *all* are priests. There is no hierarchy of mediators between us and God. First Timothy 2:5 puts it this way: "For there is one God, and *one mediator* also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus."

So if *anyone* ever tells you that you need the help of someone other than Christ Himself in order to come to God, in order to have fellowship with God, that person is a *total* misrepresentation of Christianity! *That is false doctrine! That is false teaching!* That, my friends, is *blasphemy!* That is "Antichrist" (1 Jn. 2:18), because it *replaces* who Christ is!

In Christ, *all* are "holy" (Heb. 3:1); *all* the "stones" are alive, not a select few of them exalted over the others (Jer. 31:34).

In the Book of Revelation, the Apostle John is about to receive all of these marvelous visions; and if you look at Revelation Chapter 1, starting in the middle of Verse 5, it says: "To Him who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood—and He has made us to be a kingdom"—that's another metaphor for the Church; we *are* "a kingdom" and He is the King—"priests to His God and Father"—"He has made us to be...priests"—"to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen" (vss. 5-6).

Work your way a little bit farther along through the Book of Revelation, and you come to something that a group of angels sing around the throne of God. Now, remember: Think back to First Peter 1. We saw in First Peter Chapter 1 that *all* of these things that you and I have in Christ—it says these are "things into which angels long to look." There is no redemption plan for "angels" (Heb. 2:16; cf. Matt. 8:29). Those who fell with Satan—they are fallen forever; their destiny is "the lake of fire" (Rev. 20:10; cf. Matt. 25:41). Angels are *fascinated* by—and they constantly glorify God over—the fact that He saves people like you and me (Lk. 15:10). That is an amazing thing to them.

So, look up at Revelation Chapter 5, Verse 10. This is sung by angels around the throne of God: "You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth." This is speaking of what Christ has accomplished for you.

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So, Peter knew all of that, and he knew all about what priests were in the Old Testament. So, when he says we are a "priesthood," *he meant a lot by that!*

Here is a synopsis of what the Old Testament teaches about priests. And you being called "priests" is all built upon this; it goes even further.

But notice that God sovereignly chose the priests. You did not run for office. You did not submit a resumé and go through an interview process. You were chosen to be a priest, if you were going to be a priest at all (Heb. 5:4). Well, the same is true of you. Peter says that in the first verse of this book: I am writing to you who "reside as aliens...*chosen*."

Second: God cleansed them from their sin before they began their duties. A priest did not just show up for work in the morning, roll up his sleeves, and start sacrificing animals. *He* had to present sacrifices before he would be authorized to present the sacrifice on behalf of anybody else (Lev. 9:7; Heb. 5:3; 7:27). Well, Peter says that the same is true of you. In the second verse of this book: *You* have been "sanctified."

Then, God clothed the priests in special "garments" that were designed for their role befitting the priest (Ex. 28:2). You are clothed in the "righteousness" of Christ (Is. 61:10; Phil. 3:9). His "righteousness" is applied to your account (Rom. 4:5), so that when God looks at you, He sees you *in Christ* rather than seeing you in your sin (2 Cor. 5:21; cf. Rom. 8:33).

And then we noticed that God gave a special anointing to Old Testament priests. There was a ceremony involving "anointing" with "oil" (Ex. 29:7, 21). In First John Chapter 2, the New Testament says that all believers in Christ have a special "anointing" from Him (vss. 20, 27). God provided the training and the ability to the priest in the Old Testament; He provides the same to us now in the New Testament.

And finally: Peter understood that Old Testament priests were called to rigorous obedience to *precisely* what God had revealed. Remember the day the priesthood was inaugurated? It was the grand opening day of the Tabernacle in the wilderness. Aaron had been sovereignly chosen by God to be the High Priest, and his four sons were the second, third, fourth, and fifth ranking priests. And remember: Aaron offers the sacrifice, and God gave that *spectacular* confirmation that He accepted the sacrifice; He sent that divine bolt of lightning to "consume" the offering off of the altar, and leave everything else intact (Lev. 9:24). And then Nadab and Abihu said, "Wow! That was *cool!* Let's see what we can do!" And they offered their own sacrifice. And God sent this spectacular bolt of lightning that "consumed" *Nadab and Abihu* on the spot (Lev. 10:2)—didn't even touch their clothes. And remember what is said then in Leviticus 10 about that? God says: "By those who come near Me I will be treated as holy" (vs. 3). That is what God requires: *precisely* what He asks (Deut. 5:32; 11:32; 12:32; Jos. 23:6).

So, *nothing less* than all of that is included in the background of the word "priest" as in: We are "a priesthood" in Christ; we are "being built up" in this "spiritual house" as a "priesthood." God has provided all that for you in Christ.

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It is *truly* sad that in some groups which call themselves "Christian," there are people who are called "priests." That has the clear implication that in those circles, people who believe in Christ in general are *not* regarded as priests, and then there is this other level of spirituality or authority or whatever who are regarded as priests.

My friend: No one who has even a *shred* of comprehension of the New Testament Doctrine of Salvation could *ever* allow himself to be called a "priest"! That is *usurping* the role of Jesus Christ! It is *blasphemous*! It is a *big, big deal*!

There *is no such thing* as a "Christian priest"! We have "*one mediator*" (1 Tim. 2:5), one "great high priest" who has already ascended to "Heaven" (Heb. 4:14).

When I was ordained in 1974, I was given the certificate after I had gone through the ceremony after I had gone through the ordination council and all of that. And then someone told me that, "Now you are entitled to use the title 'Reverend.'" And I went and looked up "Reverend," and I decided on that day: I will *never, ever* want to be called "Reverend" because it means "one to be revered"!

I don't want that title! I don't want to be in competition with Jesus! Call me "Jim"—that works just fine! If you want to use a title, maybe to teach your kids respect, you can use "Pastor" because that is a functional title; that is a shepherd *among* the sheep. But I don't get carried away with that one, either, because "pastor" backwards is "rotsap"—it doesn't exactly give you spiritual goosebumps to be called that.

But understand: Don't *ever* call someone on Earth by the *spiritual title* of "Father" or "Reverend" or "Most Reverend" or whatever. Where did I get an idea like that? From what Jesus said. In the chapter where He is condemning the Pharisees for their hypocrisy, in Matthew 23:9 He says: "Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven." *Don't use that title!* We are *all* "living stones" being "built" *together* into "a spiritual house" as a "priesthood"!

Now, it is true: Paul, when he wrote to the Corinthians—First Corinthians Chapter 4, Verse 15—he refers to himself as their "father"—their spiritual father. That refers to the fact that he was the one who preached the Gospel to them. It is like he was involved in the birth process (cf. Philem. 10; cf. 1 Tim. 1:2; Titus 1:4). But he would *never* have allowed *anyone* to address him by the title of "Father." He just meant: "I am one generation ahead of you in the spiritual family tree."

Likewise, the Apostle John refers to certain believers as "fathers" in First John Chapter 2, Verses 13 and 14. But read that carefully in its context: It is very *obvious* that he is not talking about a *title* associated with an exalted position; he is talking about a relative level of spiritual maturity. There are the "little children"—he is writing to everyone; we are all "little children." And then he says there are some who have become "strong" in the "Word," and he calls them "young men." And then he says there are also the "fathers"—there are those who have gained wisdom and experience. But likewise, John would never have accepted being addressed as "father." (see 2 Jn. 1; 3 Jn. 1; cf. 1 Pet. 5:1)

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Look, this may burst your bubble, but look around the room. You are in a room full of a whole bunch of priests. *Every single individual* who trusts Christ and Christ alone for salvation is part of *the New Covenant priesthood!* That's what the Bible says! First Peter 2:5—"You also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house *for a holy priesthood.*"

Now, the logical question is: "Then what are we supposed to *do* as priests?" Glad you asked. We Are A Holy Priesthood...To Offer Up Spiritual Sacrifices.

Look at the next phrase: "being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, *to offer up spiritual sacrifices.*"

The primary function of an Old Testament priest in the Tabernacle, or later in the Temple, was to offer animal sacrifices to God on behalf of His people. That very precise and very bloody system taught relentlessly that "the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23; cf. Ezek. 18:4). There *had to be* a death to make "atonement" for the sin (Lev. 17:11; cf. Heb. 9:22). The fact that those sacrifices had to be repeated over and over and over again further taught relentlessly that there is a need for a "once for all" sacrifice for sin (Heb. 7:27). They were all pictures pointing to the *perfect* sacrifice (Heb. 9:12; 10:4). Jesus Christ *is* that "once for all" sacrifice for sin. The passage that we read in John this morning: "Behold, the Lamb of God who *takes away the sin* of the world!" (Jn. 1:29) Not just dealing with it until next week's sacrifice; taking it away (Heb. 9:26; 10:11-14).

Well now, if that is true—it He is the "once for all" sacrifice for sin—why does the New Testament say that we are "priests"? Shouldn't the priesthood be completely a thing of the past? Well, in a *sense*, it *is*—in that the "once for all" sacrifice has been made. But then again, Jesus is the perfect "high priest" (Heb. 7:26), whom Hebrews says "always lives to make intercession for" us (7:25), and so He is still functioning as a priest (vs. 24); and He left us with things to do as "believer-priests"—as this "priesthood."

Now, unlike the Old Testament priests, *our* "sacrifices" are—look at our text--"*spiritual*," not physical. What are "spiritual sacrifices"? You know, if you say, "Bring a lamb meeting certain specifications, and sacrifice it," I get that. What is a "spiritual sacrifice"?

Well, let me list for you the ones that the New Testament mentions. These are "spiritual sacrifices":

First and foremost: Offer up your body for His service. Most of you already know what verse you are going to see next: Romans 12:1 and 2—"Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God"—he has laid out the Gospel in great detail for 11 chapters; and he says, "Now, therefore, based on all these mercies of God, I urge you to *present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice*, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect." So, it starts with your "mind"; it starts with you processing what God has revealed, and that leads to you presenting yourself to Him every day as a sacrifice.

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You don't bring *dead* sacrifices; you bring yourself! (2 Cor. 8:5) And this is an every day, ongoing offering. It is the same as what Romans earlier describes as yielding yourself to be a "slave to righteousness" rather than a slave to sin (6:19). Based upon "the mercies of God"—what He has already done for me—what a privilege I have! I can get up in the morning and I can say, "God, here I am! Use me! Send me! Let me speak Your truth. Let me serve You." *What a privilege* that is!

Another "spiritual sacrifice": Offer up your praise and thanks. Hebrews Chapter 13, Verse 15, says: "Through Him then"—and that is, of course, through Christ, the "great high priest" (Heb. 4:14)—"let us continually"—so this is not something you do once—"offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name."

This is more than just saying, "Thanks." Virtually every time I pray, "Thanks" or "Thank You" are almost the first words that come out of my lips; and I think that is fine, but it is more than that. It is "the fruit of lips that give thanks *to His name*." Now you might say, "What is the difference between that and giving thanks to *Him*?" Well, you *do* thank Him as the Person, the recipient (e.g., Rom. 7:25; 1 Cor. 15:57; 2 Cor. 2:14; 9:15, etc.); but "thanks to His name"—"His name" stands for *all that He is* (e.g., Ex. 33:19; 34:5-7; Is. 9:6). It implies that you know His attributes, and you are being thankful *for all that He is!* (1 Chr. 29:13; Ps. 7:17; 52:9; 54:6; 116:17; 138:2; Is. 25:1)

Can you recite a list of the attributes of God? You can, if you studied with us during our midweek services this year. All of you who were there already have it running around in your mind—the sentence that we memorized: "God is a spirit: infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, truth, love, and sovereignty." I am *so thankful* for the seminary prof that beat that into *my* head—in a two-word-shorter version—so many years ago. It gives me the framework of understanding: "Giving thanks *to His name*" means *for all of that*, in every circumstance! *What a privilege that is*, to be able to "offer up" *continually* "praise and thanks to His name"!

The very next verse includes two more "spiritual sacrifices": You can offer up good works and sharing your resources. Hebrews 13:16—"And do not neglect *doing good* and *sharing*, for with such sacrifices God is pleased."

"Doing good" simply describes doing any act which is for the good of someone else, for "the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31). You do what helps somebody else—that is a worthy "spiritual sacrifice." *What a privilege it is* to serve other people on behalf of "the King of kings" (1 Tim. 6:15; Rev. 17:14; 19:16).

"Sharing" is being generous with what God entrusts to you. Look how Paul describes the financial sacrifice of the Philippians who supported him, even while he was in prison in Rome for the first time. When he writes his great "thank you" letter to them, the Book of Philippians, he gets to almost the end, and in Philippians 4:18 he says: "But I have received everything in full and have an abundance"—in other words: "I have more than just today's food"—"I am amply supplied, having received from Epaphroditus"—the man who carried the letter and the gift to him—"what you have sent, a fragrant aroma, an *acceptable sacrifice*, well-pleasing to God."

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Scripture Text: 1 Peter 2:5 (1 Peter #10)

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 5-29-16

What a way to picture what *you* do in service for the Lord! You do that, and the Lord says "[inhaling]—Oh, that's nice!" A "fragrant aroma...well-pleasing to God." (see Eph. 5:2; cf. Gen. 8:21; Ex. 29:18; Lev. 1:9; Num. 15:3; Ezek. 20:41, etc.) That's a "spiritual sacrifice."

You can also offer up converts. This comes from Paul's example of his perspective on his ministry to the Gentiles. He says this in Romans 15, Verses 15 and 16—"But I have written very boldly to you on some points so as to remind you again, because of the grace that was given me from God, to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles, ministering as a priest the gospel of God"—in other words: telling you "the gospel of God" as the message of God (see Mal. 2:7)—"so that my offering of the Gentiles may become acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit."

Every time the Apostle Paul saw a soul turn to Christ through his ministry, he regarded it as "offering up a sacrifice" for the glory of God. *What a privilege* it is to be part of the New Covenant priesthood!

One more: You may offer up prayers. This is an interesting concept: that God is pleased with your prayers (Prov. 15:8b; cf. Ps. 62:8; 141:2; Rev. 5:8).

There is something that comes at the beginning of John's vision of the Seventh Seal in Revelation. This is not aquatic animals who bark and slap their fins and do tricks, it's breaking the seals that are sealing a scroll that unfold the judgments of God. The seventh of those seven opens up another series of seven, which opens up another series of seven. When you get to that Seventh Seal, listen to this description. This is just a little insight into how God sees the process of prayer: Revelation 8:3-4—"Another angel came and stood at the altar"—this is an "altar" that is in Heaven—"holding a golden censer"—a "censer" is the thing that you have burning incense in, and it distributes the fragrance of the incense—"and much incense was given to him, so that he might add it to the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, went up before God out of the angel's hand."

The symbolism is of the "prayers" of God's people rising to God as an "offering" (Ps. 141:2), and they are being borne along by the sweet smell of "incense" which is pleasing to God (Rev. 5:8).

What a privilege! If you are a child of God by faith in Jesus Christ, it is your *privilege*, it should be your joy to daily please God through the "spiritual sacrifices" that you "offer up" to Him! Are those the things that are most important to you? Offering up your body for His service? Offering up your praise and thanks? Offering up your good works? Offering up sharing of your resources? Offering up converts that you may be privileged to introduce to the Savior? And offering up prayers? *What a privilege*, that that can be our focus!

Far too often, I think we unwittingly, unintentionally portray the Christian life as a list of "do's and don'ts"; and it comes across as if we feel this *duty* to be a Christian, and we carry this great *burden* of all the things that we have to do.

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Now, don't misunderstand: I am not saying there isn't right and wrong. God says to do certain things, and not to do other things. That is true.

But if you think of being a Christian as performing a list of "do's and don'ts," I want to challenge you to reexamine your idea of the Gospel, reexamine your idea of "the grace of God" (1 Cor. 15:10; cf. Rom. 11:6; Eph. 2:8).

Last week, I pointed out to you the words of Jesus, and Josh read them at the beginning of our service, from Matthew 11:28 and 29. This is Jesus—speaking, by the way, in the Gospel of Matthew, which is addressed to the Jews. And in this particular setting, Jesus is speaking in the context of the hearing of the Pharisees—the religious "hypocrites" (Matt. 23:13-31), the ones who were teaching a works-righteousness system (Rom. 9:32). Jesus says this: "Come to Me"—don't go get on that treadmill those guys have for you (Matt. 23:4)—"Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."

The Gospel is about *relieving* you of the burden of trying to perform in order to get God to accept you (Acts 13:39; Rom. 10:4). The Gospel is about finding "rest for your soul" because Jesus has borne the penalty for your sins (Col. 2:14; cf. Is. 53:5; 2 Cor. 5:21).

When your "soul" is at "rest" in Christ, you see every day as a glorious *privilege* to "serve Him" (Lk. 1:74; cf. Jn. 14:15; 1 Jn. 5:3). It is your *privilege* to "obey Him" (Heb. 5:9; cf. Ps. 40:8; Rom. 7:22). It is your *privilege* to "know Him" (Phil. 3:10; 1 Jn. 2:3; cf. Jn. 17:3). It is your *privilege* to "hear" His "voice" through the Word of God (Jn. 10:27; cf. Jn. 8:47). It is your *privilege* to "proclaim" Him (Lk. 9:60; Acts 9:20; 1 Pet. 2:9). It is your *privilege* to "pray" (1 Thess. 5:17; cf. Ps. 62:8; 1 Pet. 5:7). It is your *privilege* to serve others (Gal. 6:10; Philem. 7; Heb. 6:10). It is your *privilege* to share (Acts 2:45; 4:34-35; Rom. 12:13; 15:26; 2 Cor. 8:1-4; 9:12). It is your *privilege* to "praise" Him (Ps. 33:1; 34:1; 40:3; 63:3; 106:1; 148:13; Is. 12:5; Matt. 11:25; Eph. 1:6; Rev. 19:5). It is your *privilege* to "give thanks" to Him (1 Thess. 5:18; cf. Ps. 7:17; 9:1; 86:12).

These are our spiritual *privileges* because we "are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood"!

Now I want you to see the glorious conclusion to this sentence. We Are A Holy Priesthood To Offer Up Spiritual Sacrifices—and notice the end of this sentence: We "are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices"—notice these last words—"acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."

There is something here that I *have* to show you—it is *so cool!* I actually had a hard time finding commentators who caught this, because it *does* just flow—you know: "Offer up these spiritual sacrifices, and they are acceptable to God." Well, that is true; those "sacrifices" *are* "acceptable to God"; He *does* just *drink them in* like a sweet aroma!

But there is something else here. Let me give you a little detail, and then I will put it together.

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The word "acceptable" looks like an adjective in English. It is actually a participle in the Greek. And remember: A Greek participle describes a circumstance which is connected to the action of the main verb in the sentence. In this case, the verb is: "to offer up." The subject of the verb is: the ones who do the "offering up"—the "living stones." "Living stones...offer up spiritual sacrifices."

Now, here is what is interesting: The word "stones" is a masculine noun. The Greek language has masculine, feminine, and neuter nouns and adjectives and participles, and they always have to agree with that which they are connected to. The noun "sacrifices" is feminine. The word "acceptable" is masculine, therefore it is connected to "the living stones," *not* the "sacrifices."

Your "sacrifices" are "acceptable"—I'm not saying they are not. A lot of other passages say that. But He is *not* saying that if you bring enough "spiritual sacrifices" to please God, you are then going to become "acceptable" to Him. It is *not* emphasizing that your "sacrifices" are "acceptable" to Him—though they are. It is that *you* are "acceptable to God through Jesus Christ," and *therefore* the "spiritual" offerings you bring are "acceptable" to Him! If a *worshipper* is not acceptable, his *offering* is not going to be accepted (see Prov. 15:8a; 21:27a; Is. 1:13; Matt. 5:23-24).

You are "accepted" (Eph. 1:6, NKJV; cf. Rom. 7:4; 8:33-34; 1 Cor. 1:8; 2 Cor. 5:21; Eph. 1:4; Col. 1:12, 22). Get off the treadmill of bondage of trying to be good enough for God to like you a little bit more today than He did yesterday! That's a done deal! He already made you *perfectly* holy in Christ's righteousness (Phil. 3:9; Heb. 10:14), so *accept* the privilege of "offering spiritual sacrifices" to Him.

Do you see now why the "Universal Priesthood of Believers" was such a *monumental issue* 500 years ago, in the time of the Protestant Reformation? You don't need some other human to stand between you and God. *You are acceptable to God* through Christ Jesus!

So, are you enjoying your privileges? What do your "sacrifices" look like? (Ps. 51:17) Could someone who follows you around tell that you belong to Jesus Christ by how you live for Him? (Phil. 2:15) What *incredible* privileges we have in Christ: "being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices" because we are "acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."

Heavenly Father, again our prayer is simple: We want You to do whatever You need to do in us and with us so that You might do what You are pleased to do through us. May it all be for Your glory. Whatever it is that might stand in the way of us better exercising our privileges to "offer up" these "spiritual sacrifices," sweep it away, we pray. We present our bodies as "living sacrifices" to You afresh and anew today, in Jesus' name. Amen.