

INTRODUCTION

- A. Our goal today is to *expand our faith* as it relates to what the Word of God says about a very controversial topic. This topic has led to bloodshed, feuds and wars, schisms and divisions, strife, pain and sorrow. This topic is the church.
- B. Once a month at we quote the Apostle's creed as we take communion as a congregation. We state the major tenants of orthodox faith handed down to us by church fathers.
I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate...I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic (worldwide) Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins...
- C. Why is that in there? Why are we declaring that we *believe* in the church – that it exists and that it is holy?
- D. Often what the bible says about God is much more believable than what the bible says about the church. Why do we have faith for the revelation of God in the Word but lack faith for the revelation of His church in the Word?
- E. GK Chesterton famously said: *there is only one unanswerable argument against Christianity: Christians.*
- F. Yet, there are staggering promises about what the church is like and where she is going. Have we considered what the bible says about the church?
⁷ that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. (Eph. 5:7)
¹³ till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (Eph. 4:13)
⁸ To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ...¹⁰ to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places,¹¹ according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord... (Eph. 3:8-11)
- G. God is not done with the church, He's only beginning.
- H. The church in the generation of the Lord's return will be the generation in history in which the she will be in *full agreement* with the Spirit, in *unity of faith*, walking in *unprecedented power* and *mature love*.

¹⁷ *And the Spirit and the bride say (in unison), “Come!” And let him who hears say, “Come!” (Rev. 22:17)*

- I. Could we be a part of that generation?

II. COME TO HIM – THE LIVING STONE – THE CORNERSTONE

- A. The only way to understand *who we are* is to come to the One who made us. The only way to understand what the church is and how it operates is to come to the One who began it.

⁴ *Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious...*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. (1 Peter 2:4, 6)*

1. What exactly forms our opinion of the church?
 2. Does that opinion rely mostly on recent and past experiences? Or does scripture form it?
- B. ***Coming to Him***– Here is the first and primary response: *Come to Him*. Three simple words, yet contained in them is wealth of meaning.

⁸ ***Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. (Mt. 11:8)***

1. To come to Him means that we must admit that we need something.
 2. It means that we’ve probably tried something else and failed.
 3. It requires humility because we must receive something that cannot be earned. Even the very nature of the gospel is that we *freely receive* what has been *freely given* – the grace of God.
- C. ⁴*[Come] ... as to a living stone...*⁶*a chief cornerstone-* the cornerstone is the *first* and *most important* part of building a structure. The cornerstone was a choice rock that had been hewn and shaped with *precision* by the builder.
1. Everyone has a cornerstone that they’re building upon (1 Cor. 3:9-17). There is a way to determine what our cornerstone is: when everything seems to be falling apart what is it that we turn to?
 2. Why a ***living stone***? Because Christ is not dead. He didn’t leave behind a stack of teachings that point their way to God. He’s a living stone – breathing – feeling – seeing – interacting – resurrected and *fully engaged* with His people.

- a. We're all stones. Like Him we're living— interconnected. We share experiences and lives, and failures, and meals and victories together. And all of us relate first and foremost to the cornerstone, the living stone – Christ.
 - b. There is a dynamic relational aspect to the church amongst one another and with Jesus. We're not cold dead rocks.
 - c. Everyone has a cornerstone that they're building upon (1 Cor. 3:9-17). There is a way to determine what our cornerstone is: when everything is being challenged (seems to be falling apart) what is it that we turn to?
3. Christ is *the* cornerstone. Every other stone had to line up with the cornerstone. In like manner, every person that *comes to Him* must line up with His values and desires or else they cannot build upon Him. They cannot join Him.
 4. Yet, our *deepest satisfaction and delight* comes when we are in full agreement with the person and ways of the Lord.
- D. ***...rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God*** - That is our natural state – rejecting God, rejecting His ways, rejecting His church. Yet, God says, this is *the One* I've chosen (6...***I lay in Zion...***), this is *the way* I've chosen. We either choose to get on board with His way or choose to reject it.
1. They reject the cornerstone because He's in the lowest spot. Humanity wants a king who will wield power and subjugate those on the *outside*; yet here comes this servant stone, humble, precious, laying down His life. He came with military might not to shed His enemies' blood but with *His own blood to redeem them*.
 2. They reject Him because they *resist* what it takes to be *in alignment* with Him. The problem is that naturally occurring stones can't line up with a *precision cornerstone*. Those rough stones have to be shaped and smoothed (ground down, by God) in order to fit alongside the cornerstone.
 3. They reject the idea that a precious stone would be in the *foundation*. Jesus is called "choice" and twice called "precious." Why would you take something highly valuable and esteemed and hide it down in the foundation?
 - a. Imagine a contractor comes to the site and his foundation guy is there and he says, "We've laid diamonds down in the foundation because they're really strong..."
 - b. That plan would seem ridiculous. Why would you do that?

III. CHURCH AS LIVING STONES

⁵ *you also, as, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ...⁹ But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises [excellencies – virtue, moral excellence, perfection] 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. (1 Peter 2:5, 9-10)*

- A. As Christ is the cornerstone, we take on similar form. We are **living stones**, not just cold dead stones; active, alert stones. We *relate* to one another and are *associated* with one another.
- B. Stones are used as building material for their durability and strength. They are able to endure weather and hardship, pressure and challenge without collapsing. That's God view of those who constitute the church.
- C. ***being built up a spiritual house*** – why are we stones? What is being built? A spiritual house, a dwelling. A house for whom? God.
 - 1. This term “being built” is a present progressive. It means that it's *in process* and it's *corporate*. As we *find one another in relationship*, as living stones the Lord builds us into a house for His presence and His glory.
 - 2. In other words, the community that is built around the values and the desires of the cornerstone serves to “build up” a dwelling for God.

IV. PROCLAIMING HIS EXCELLENCIES

⁹ *But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises [excellencies – virtue, moral excellence, perfection] of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light (1 Peter. 2:9)*

- A. This building, constructed by God, connected to the living stone has a purpose. It serves to proclaim Christ's excellencies in all the earth.
- B. Think of it this way, the glory of a temple is meant to glorify the deity that lives within it. The more splendid and glorious the building, the more that those on the outside marvel and think, “Wow, who is the God who lives in there!?”
- C. We see the full glory of the church evidenced in the brilliant beauty of God's spiritual house – the New Jerusalem.

² *Then I, John,^[a] saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be*

His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God...⁹Then one of the seven angels...talked with me, saying, “Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb’s wife.”¹⁰ And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy¹¹ Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, ¹¹ having the glory of God. Her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal. (Rev. 22:2-3, 9-11)