

influencing
culture

SCRIPTURE FOCUS

Rom. 12:1, 2; 1 Peter 2:1–12

BUILDUP THEME



BELIEVE THE GOSPEL

God calls believers to show His glorious greatness to a culture mired in sin and darkness.

MEMORY VERSE

1 Peter 2:9

Coffee? A comfy recliner? A tattered robe? A special car? Or perhaps a special piece of jewelry? What is your “precious”? What gives you instant satisfaction and enjoyment?

1. How do you let people know what you consider to be your "precious"?
2. How do you respond when you lose your "precious" or have to go without it?

As believers in a worldly culture, we should live so that others see Jesus as our “precious.” This session reminds us of the importance of shining Christ in a culture darkened by sin.

Bible Study

Peter wrote his first epistle to first-century believers scattered throughout the Roman Empire. Many of his readers were experiencing persecution for their faith. The Roman culture clashed with their Christian beliefs and lifestyle. The Romans sought to silence the Christians' counter-cultural messages of salvation through Christ and devotion to God. Peter's words encouraged believers to rejoice in their connection with Christ and to reject their pagan culture. As they rejoiced in their salvation, they would give themselves opportunities to influence their culture for Christ. Peter's instructions translate to today, giving us a Biblical perspective on living as believers in a culture that is counter to Christianity.

By God's Word Make a Radical Separation from Sin

Peter opened chapter 2 of his letter with a call to believers to lay aside specific sins so they might stand out from their culture rather than blend into it. Earlier in his letter, he had instructed them to love one another fervently with pure hearts (1 Peter 1:22).

The attitudes and actions that Peter identified (2:1) obviously clash with God's desire for believers to love one another (1:22). Peter told his readers to lay aside all malice (wickedness, depravity, or evil conduct), envy (displeasure from another's advantage), all deceit or guile (hypocritical acts), and all evil speaking or slandering (belittling others).

3. Read 1 Peter 2:1. Where do you see the sins that Peter identifies appearing in today's culture?

"All" (2:1) in Peter's instructions means "every kind" and "every degree." So, Peter called for a radical separation in all settings and from any kind of evil actions, envy, hypocrisy, and belittling of others. Christians should lay aside such sins whether they are alone, with unbelievers at work, with family members at home, or with other believers at church.

4. What reasons might believers give for acting like the world when they are with unsaved friends or coworkers?

Peter didn't leave room for excuses in verse 1. He expected the first-century believers to be radically different than the Romans. God expects the same of believers today. But believers won't be radically different on their own; they need to feed on God's Word.

Have an Insatiable Desire for the Word

5. Read 1 Peter 2:2. How do newborn babies demonstrate their desire for milk?

Newborns need as many as eight to twelve feedings in their first few days. They are relentless in their pursuit of milk because it satisfies their hunger and allows them to rest, find strength, and grow. Peter wanted believers' appetites for God's Word to be like a newborn's appetite for milk. Believers should crave God's Word because it causes them to grow as believers, becoming distinct from and effective influences on their culture.

Peter knew by experience that the Lord is "gracious" (1 Peter 2:3). By "gracious" he meant that what the Lord offers believers through His Word fits their needs. God's Word satisfies believers. They never find God's Word to be bitter and detestable. Sin, by contrast, always leaves the believer unsatisfied, disillusioned, and disappointed. Sin's aftertaste will always be bitter and destructive and never sweet and strengthening.

Believers who crave God's Word and "feed" on it regularly will experience the contentment and joy that they never experienced while sinning. Tasting God's Word through thorough study and application of its truths makes believers different from the world. They live satisfied while unbelievers around them go spiritually hungry.

Shine Through Spiritual Connections to Believers

Peter jumped to a second metaphor to help believers understand their place in culture. He called each believer a "living stone" (1 Peter 2:5) because they have a spiritual connection as part of the Church, the Body of Christ (Eph. 1:22, 23). The Holy Spirit lives in all true believers and spiritually connects them to form a living temple to God (Eph. 2:21). As part of the temple of God, they offer spiritual sacrifices

to the Lord. Paul called believers' spiritual sacrifices "living sacrifices" in Romans 12:1 and 2.

As God's Word transforms believers' minds and makes them increasingly less like the culture, they give themselves (their bodies) to the Lord as change agents in the world. Believers can live obediently to God's will by the Holy Spirit in them and through their mutual help and support as connected living stones. They obey God in that they live holy lives (1 Peter 1:13–16) and tell the lost about God's greatness. Their salvation in Christ makes their sacrifice of themselves possible and acceptable to God (2:5).

6. How has God's desire to change the culture through you affected how you view your purpose in this world?

Shine Through Spiritual Connection to Christ

The Jews rejected Christ as a liar and a fraud (1 Peter 2:4; John 1:11). He came as "light," but they preferred darkness (John 3:19). He came as the promised Messiah, but their blindness was so great that the priests and rulers rejected His claims despite His miracles and teachings. Some individual Jews accepted and praised Jesus, but the nation in general rejected and crucified Him.

God, of course, views the Son quite differently. Since before creation, the Father planned to offer salvation to the world through the Son. The Son willingly carried out the Father's plan to bear the sins of the world on the cross. The Father views the Son as precious and prized because there would be no hope for humanity without Him.

In 1 Peter 2:6, Peter quoted Isaiah 28:16 to emphasize Christ's role as the believer's foundation and cornerstone for their saving faith. Christ is both the solid rock foundation on which He builds His church and the Stone that unites and holds together all the "living stones." Those who put their faith in Christ's work on the cross will always be connected to Him, their cornerstone and foundation.

7. Read 1 Peter 2:6–8. What is the difference between how believers view Christ and how unbelievers view Christ?

As believers, we must recognize Christ's preciousness to us and live in such a way that others recognize the preciousness of Christ too. We must influence our culture by showing them the tremendous difference Christ makes in our lives as our Savior and as the foundation for our lives. Our lives should "glow" with Christ's greatness.

8. What does your life say about Jesus? Do you demonstrate by your choices that Jesus is "precious" and great?

"A stone of stumbling" (2:8) refers to Christ as an obstacle against which the unbelieving kick. A "rock of offense" speaks of Christ as a ledge or a solid rock over which the unbeliever trips. The "stone of stumbling" and "rock of offense" were related especially to unbelieving Israel's view of Christ. Peter made the reference broader in scope by stating that it includes those who stumble (are scandalized) at the word, meaning the gospel (1 Cor. 1:23). The disobedient or unbelieving resist the person of Christ and the gospel in the Word of God. Eventually the Stone will judge and condemn them for their sins.

Represent God as Holy Priests

Peter added to the living stones metaphor by comparing believers to priests (1 Peter 2:5). God expected the Levitical priests of the Old Testament to be holy and clean. Under the New Covenant all believers are members of a new priesthood. God still expects believer priests to be holy and separated to Him (1 Peter 1:13–16). Positively, being holy means living obediently to God's commands. Negatively, being holy means not living according to the sinful desires that characterize the lost in the world (1:14).

9. Read 1 Peter 2:5. Why must believers live as holy priests before the world?

Believers who long to live like the world need to remember God's coming judgment on sinners. God's wrath will be severe and permanent (John 3:36; Rev. 20:11–15). Sinners need believers to be holy

priests so they can see the futility of living according to their sinful lusts.

Represent God as Royal Priests

The Church is something new, a chosen people from all nationalities who are born into a new family by spiritual new generation at salvation (1 Peter 2:9, 10). Being a part of God's family makes believers "royal priests" (cf. Rev. 1:6). Christ is our king. We serve as His royal representatives on earth now and will one day rule with Him in His earthly Kingdom (Rev. 5:9, 10).

To live as God's royal priests means we proclaim the praises of Christ Who called us out of spiritual darkness to live in His marvelous light.

10. Read 1 Peter 2:9, 10. What praiseworthy truths about Christ could you share with the world?

11. What might sharing Christ's glorious praise look like in your life?

Live as Sojourning Pilgrims Who Reject the World's System

Though we live as royal priests, we are also strangers and pilgrims on earth (1 Peter 2:11). The word "strangers" or "sojourners" describes those who have no rights or legal status. The word "pilgrims" identifies those who are only temporary dwellers. Our citizenship is in Heaven in that we are not part of the world's system and values. Satan gives direction to the worldly system that opposes God and believers (Eph. 2:2; 1 John 5:19).

Peter begged the scattered believers to abstain from the fleshly passions that Satan and the world promote and that war against believers' souls. To "abstain" means to hold back constantly. The phrase "fleshly lusts" speaks of strong desires that are both typical of the flesh and contrary to God's holiness. Forgetting we are strangers

in the world and adopting its thinking and philosophies will hurt our ability to carry out our spiritual roles as holy and royal priests in the world.

12. Read 1 Peter 2:11. When have you felt the tension between fitting in with the world and living distinct from the world?

Live as Sojourning Pilgrims Who Reflect Christ's Character

Positively, Peter instructed his readers to keep their conduct honorable before the world (1 Peter 2:12). Honorable actions are those that reflect a believer's inward spiritual reality. Christ saved us and made us righteous, so we ought to live righteously in the world. As we do, some will respond to the gospel and glorify God in the "day of visitation," a reference to the day God intervenes in a person's life, either to save or judge the person.

Application

13. Think areas of your life in which you encounter worldly culture (e.g., social media, work, gym). For each area you record, evaluate your current influence on those around you. Think about your attitudes, reactions, speech, and behavior in these surroundings. Do you tend to blend in, or can people see a difference in your life? Does your life reflect the light of Christ into the spiritually dark world?

14. Jot down possible changes you can make in your life in each environment.