

THE GOSPEL PROJECT – CHRONOLOGICAL LETTERS TO GOD’S PEOPLE THE GOD WHO DIRECTS HIS PEOPLE *Toward an Enduring Identity*

In our times, we hear much in the news about stolen identities which include credit card theft, stolen drivers’ licenses and abuse of Social Security numbers. Some are careless with their personal identity information while others go to great lengths to protect their information with frequent credit checks and obtaining personal identity insurance. It is practical to protect our personal identity from thieves in this digital age. However, as wise as it is to protect our personal information, it is even wiser to be diligent and protective with our spiritual identification with Christ. Peter explained why in **1 Peter 5:8 (ESV)**⁸ *Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.* Be warned Satan is an identity thief.

Today’s letter to God’s people takes us to **1 Peter** written by the Apostle Peter. This letter was originally sent to churches in what is now modern-day Turkey and is delivered to us today by the power of the Holy Spirit of God!

Living Stones – The Church is Constituted by Christ

Read 1 Peter 2:1-3 (ESV)¹ *So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander.*² *Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation—*³ *if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.*

The first order of business in protecting our spiritual identity involves getting rid of things that hinder spiritual growth such as malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy and slander. Being involved in those activities cause us to resemble the world – not Christ. Next, we fill our hearts and minds with spiritual growth. Spiritual growth begins by being disciplined in God’s Word. Paul explained in **2 Timothy 3:16-17 (ESV)**¹⁶ *All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,*¹⁷ *that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.* We live in a world where many are obsessed with food and its effects on our physical bodies. In order to have healthy spiritual growth, we must be obsessed with the Word of God just like hungry babies long for milk! Some refuse to taste something just because they have ‘decided’ that it does not taste good. Do not make that mistake with the food of God’s Word! **Psalm 34:8 (ESV)**⁸ *Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!*

Wiersbe makes this thought provoking comment, “It is sad when Christians have no appetite for God’s Word, but must be ‘fed’ religious entertainment instead. As we grow, we discover that the Word is milk for babes, but also strong meat for the mature.” (**Hebrews 5:11-14**)

Read 1 Peter 2:4-8 (ESV) ⁴ *As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious,* ⁵ *you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.* ⁶ *For it stands in Scripture: “Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.”* ⁷ *So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,”* ⁸ *and “A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense.” They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.*

To protect our identity with Christ we need a strong foundation! Isaiah prophesied of the coming Messiah as being a Stone in **Isaiah 28:16 (ESV)** ¹⁶ *therefore thus says the Lord GOD, “Behold, I am the one who has laid as a foundation in Zion, a stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, of a sure foundation: ‘Whoever believes will not be in haste.’* Peter confirms in his letter that Jesus fulfilled Isaiah’s prophecy. He is the Precious Cornerstone. The cornerstone (or foundation stone) is the first stone set in the construction of a stone foundation. This is important since all other stones will be set in line to this stone. The work that we do must be to built on the foundation that Christ set.

It was the mission of the Jews to be builders for the kingdom of God. But, when the Messiah came to earth, those ‘builders’ rejected Him. The LORD of Heaven knew He would be rejected. **Psalm 118:22 (ESV)** ²² *The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.* But, He came anyway! He came to fulfill His mission. We maintain our spiritual integrity when we do our best to complete the work the Lord has prepared for us.

For our identity to be strong for God’s kingdom, we need to understand that we are *living stones- a spiritual house!* Yes, separately we are His temple. **1 Corinthians 6:19 (ESV)** ¹⁹ *Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own.* But, together we constitute the spiritual house of God! It is easy to stumble on a pile of rocks. Let’s make sure we do not cause others to stumble.

A Chosen People – The church is Commissioned by Christ

Read 1 Peter 2:9-10 (ESV) ⁹ *But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.* ¹⁰ *Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.*

When the Israelites were brought out of slavery in Egypt, God made them a promise in **Exodus 19:5-6 (ESV)** ⁵ *Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine;* ⁶ *and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel.”* This was a conditional promise – *if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant.* Israel being God’s treasured possession does not mean they were better than other nations – it means that they were set

apart for Kingdom work. As a kingdom of priests they were to point the Gentiles to the one true and living God.

At the beginning of Peter's letter, he addressed his mail this way: **1 Peter 1:1 (ESV)** ¹ *Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia.* Since the dispersion or diaspora was the scattering of the Jews from the land of Palestine into other parts of the world, it would be natural to question whether this promise Peter mentioned of a *royal priesthood* applied only to the Jews. Although the Jews were the original nation of priests, anyone who accepts Christ as Savior becomes part of that royal priesthood. It was not just Peter who said so – Jesus said it too! **Revelation 1:5-6 (ESV)** ⁵ *and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood* ⁶ *and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.* When we accept Christ as Savior, we become identified with Christ through the presence and power of His Holy Spirit. **Ephesians 1:13 (ESV)** ¹³ *In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit.*

Jesus is our High Priest. **Hebrews 9:24 (ESV)** ²⁴ *For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf.* As part of Christ's royal priesthood, we have priestly work here on earth to do.

During Old Testament times part of the work of the priesthood was to offer many different sacrifices. What sacrifices are we to offer as a kingdom of priests today? **Hebrews 13:15-16 (ESV)** ¹⁵ *Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name.* ¹⁶ *Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.*

There is another privilege we have as royal priests. We can go directly to the Throne Room of God with our petitions for ourselves and for others. This is accomplished through the prayers we pray! Hallelujah for our High Priest who is the Door to the Throne Room of Grace!

A Heavenly People – The church is called to do good works.

Read 1 Peter 2:11-17 (ESV) ¹¹ *Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.* ¹² *Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.* ¹³ *Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme,* ¹⁴ *or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good.* ¹⁵ *For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people.* ¹⁶ *Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God.* ¹⁷ *Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.*

Peter's reference to the *Gentiles* in verse 12 is not a distinction between races. The use of the word Gentile in this context is a reference to unsaved people. As followers of Christ, we recognize this world is not our home – we are just sojourning here. So many times in this world, we feel out of place – we just don't fit in. Why should we? We are not home! As the old American folk song says, "I'm just a poor wayfaring stranger traveling through this world of woe. But there's no sickness, toil nor danger in that fair land to which I go." Heaven is a home prepared for us where we will be perfectly at home!

Peter reminds us that we are to keep our conduct honorable. Warren Wiersbe says this, "During my many years of ministry, I have seen the powerful impact Christians can make on the lost when they combine a godly life with a loving witness. I remember many instances of some wonderful conversions simply because dedicated Christians let their lights shine. On the other hand, I recall with grief some lost persons who rejected the Word because of the inconsistent lives of professed believers."

The *day of visitation* that Peter mentions could mean that final time which Christ returns and every tongue will confess that He is Lord. (*Php. 2:11*). Or, it could mean the time with God visits each individual with His offer of salvation. Let's focus our identity with Christ to the point that helps others come to glorify God when He visits them with His salvation plan.

Even though we are citizens of heaven, part of our calling includes obeying the laws of our government. Peter lived in the time of the Roman Empire under Nero when Christians were severely persecuted for their faith. It was also a time when many lived as household slaves. It establishes our Christian identity when we live according to the law of the land. We are commanded to cooperate with the government authority as far as our conscience will allow. If we are to be persecuted, it should be for obeying God, not for breaking moral or civil laws. God gives us freedom from religious rules and eternal guilt; however, we must not seek to indulge our own desires; instead, we should do our best to please God and identify with His laws as found in His Word. Peter warns that we are not to use our freedom in Christ as a cover-up for evil.

I will close with a personal identity code that will help us maintain an enduring identity for the Savior. *Galatians 2:20 (ESV)* ²⁰ *I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*