

THE CHURCH AND ME - TOGETHER FOR A PURPOSE

FIRST PETER 2:1-8

SATURDAY A.M. / 19 SEPTEMBER 2009

TWIN ROCKS FRIENDS CAMP

GREGG LAMM, LEAD PASTOR-TEACHER AT 2ND STREET COMMUNITY CHURCH

www.2ndstreet.org

.PPT 1 ...

This morning we'll begin an exploration that will take us through tomorrow evening about what it means to "be the church", and the people of God who make up the church from **FIRST PETER 2:1-8**. This morning we'll look primarily at **vv. 1-3**, and this evening we'll look at **vv. 4-10** ... and then tomorrow we'll look at the rest of the chapter.

The reason I want to focus in on this subject of the Church and what Peter has to tell us about it is because there's just so much confusion today about what the church *is supposed to be* and what *it's not supposed to be*. And so it's my prayer that God will give us direction and clarity about this important topic, so we can continue becoming the church, and the people who make up the church God is calling us to be.

.PPT 2 ...

George Fox, the founder of the Quaker denomination in the mid 1600's in England was a unique and powerful combination an **apostle** (one who is "sent" from God to plant new churches), an **evangelist** (one who speaks forth the message of salvation), a **prophet** (one who calls the church back to Jesus Christ as it's First Love), and a **pastor-teacher** (a shepherd of the flock who both **GROUNDS** and **GUARDS** the people under their care through the *teaching and the living out of God's WORD*). George Fox wore so many hats that I'm sure at times he wished he had more than one head. But he really was a man with an unusual mix of the five spiritual gifts the Apostle Paul teaches about in **EPHESIANS 4:11**.

The Church of England was the only real church in the British Isles in the mid 1600's ... at least the only one that was **recognized** and **allowed** by the Crown and by a military man turned politician named Oliver Cromwell, who called himself "**The Lord Protector of England**." And to say that Oliver Cromwell "was not a good man" was one of the great understatements of history.

For nearly ten years, as "**The Lord Protector of England**," Cromwell crushed the hopes, the dreams, and the faith of people in England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland. He was an equal-opportunity oppressor who made the church bow down to him and his ideals, subjugating all the religious leaders of his day to either follow him or be executed.

In fact, Oliver Cromwell was such a loathsome scoundrel, that after he died of natural causes in 1658, he was so hated and despised by the people of England ... and by the people who succeeded him in leadership ... that three years after his death, in 1661, his body was dug up out of its grave and he was publicly executed.

Now I've heard of people **GETTING AN AWARD AFTER THEIR DEATH** ... but getting *executed* three years after you're dead and buried?! Wow! That's a new height of lowness! So Oliver Cromwell was a real piece of work ... and the oppression he brought to the British Isles *politically, socially, economically* and *spiritually* wasn't soon forgotten.

Sounds a bit like the Roman Empire, and the cultural atmosphere of the Early Church. And yet out of this time of great persecution and suffering in the mid 1600's, God raised up a variety of Christ-followers, and Christian movements, through which He brought Truth and Light to the hurting, discouraged, oppressed people of the United Kingdom.

These groups had various names, including "**The Children of the Light**," "**The Ranters**," and "**The Society Of Friends**" who were also called "**The Quakers**" ... a group of Christians who took the name "**Friends**" from Jesus' words in JOHN 15:14 when He said, "**You are my friends if you do what I command you to do.**"

.PPT 3 ...

George Fox was a shoemaker and about 25 years old when God used him to turn Oliver Cromwell and much of England on its ear. "**THE CHURCH IS THE PEOPLE, NOT THE STEEPLE**" ... George Fox was fond of saying. Out of context Fox's words sounds simple, almost like they're part of a nursery rhyme or a spiritual limerick.

And yet in the historical context in which these words were spoken, they gave birth to *an idea* and *a perception* of what the Church was. And this *perceptual shift* created *a spiritual shift* ... both when it was understood and embraced in the mid 1600's, and when it's understood and embraced in 2009. And it's out of the groundwork of these words from George Fox that I'd like to begin our teaching from FIRST PETER 2:1-8 ...

"THE CHURCH IS THE PEOPLE, NOT THE STEEPLE." Many of our churches today don't literally have a "steeple" ... and yet I believe Fox's words deserve to be paid attention to because what he was trying to get across to people, and what Peter teaches us in his words here in FIRST PETER 2 is that it's *God's design*, *God's plan*, and *God's heart* for us that the church *not be a place*, but that ...

.PPT 4 ...

The **CHURCH** is a living organism made up of walking, talking, fully-alive people who are making it their daily choice to invite Jesus Christ to teach them how to *think*, how to *speak*, how to *prioritize their lives*, and how to *live* - and who are inviting others to join them in this quest.

"THE CHURCH IS THE PEOPLE, NOT THE STEEPLE." Sometimes the people who make up the church are "**the church gathered**." Like on Sunday mornings and at other times throughout the week ... and like we're gathered here at Twin Rocks. We're literally together. And we don't come together just so we can have a "holy huddle," with the goal of keeping the world and its "ungodly influences" out.

We come together as “**the church gathered**” so that we’ll be **grounded** and **guarded** by the WORD of God, and so we’ll be **equipped** and **encouraged** to live for Jesus Christ in practical, down-to-earth, day-in-and-day-out ways. And for what purpose? So that during the other 160-something hours in the week when we’re not “**the church gathered**” that we’ll be “**the church scattered**” ... the church out in the world, engaging it, and living out our faith in ways radical and strong, and in ways simple and quiet.

.PPT 5 ...

“**The church gathered**” and “**the church scattered.**” This holy rhythm is how the influence of God and the presence of Jesus Christ in us and through us has the power to change the world. This God-cadence of “**gathered-and-scattered**” is how the Kingdom of God grows, matures, and becomes **more than just a good idea.**

God calls us, during all the hours of the week when we’re “**the church scattered**” to intentionally let our “**inward faith turn outward**”. **Scattered out** as the influence, the breathe, and the aroma of Jesus Christ ... **scattered out** into the places where we live, into our schools, into our offices, into the grocery store, into wherever we go. Because it’s only as we begin to “understand this” that we’ll begin to live **missional lives**. Lives no longer **rooted in our egos** ... lives no longer directed only by our **priorities** ... lives no longer paralyzed by fear.

ILLUSTRATION: MY MOM AND HER HAIRDRESSER

To live *missional lives* means living lives that find their *source* and *purpose* in God, that find their *hopes* and *dreams* in God ... lives that see the world, not as a “den of sinners” to be judged, feared and shunned, but as a planet filled with people who are loved by God, and who God wants to be wooed into **His Kingdom**, and into what Elton Trueblood called “**the incendiary fellowship**”, into “**the church,**” by you and by me.

- People living **MISSIONAL LIVES** see the world as a place filled with people waiting for someone to explain to them that the longing in their hearts for *significance*, for *purpose* and for a *place to belong* ... that this is God inviting them into conversation with Him.
- People living **MISSIONAL LIVES** see the world as a place filled with people waiting to be loved into the very heart of God ...
- People living **MISSIONAL LIVES** see that ultimately the *longing* and *ache* inside of them isn’t a desire for *worldly success*. But it’s a longing to know God and be known by God ...
- People living **MISSIONAL LIVES** long to know themselves, their *real selves* ... and long to know others and be known by others.
- People living **MISSIONAL LIVES** have a nearly inexpressible yearning to experience the transforming power of spiritual community.

- People living **MISSIONAL LIVES** have a hunger to connect with Jesus Christ, the One who one day stepped out of heaven for the single purpose of stepping into our lives.

ILLUSTRATION ... MY FRIEND AND THE AUTO TRADER LADY ...

Can we really begin to live this way? Yes we can ... but only with God's help. I'm filled with great hope that this is who we are becoming and who we will continue becoming as the people called the **"FOLLOWERS OF JESUS CHRIST"**, and as the people called **"QUAKERS"** ... as **THE CHURCH GATHERED** and as **THE CHURCH SCATTERED** ... as the people we've been called by God to live and be His presence, His light, His hands and feet, and His ears and mouth in a world that desperately needs to experience Who God is, and what His plans are for us as His people.

And if this is a vision of *who the church can be* that you want to learn more about and live into, then you're in luck. Because this is a description of who and what God longs for us to *be* and to *become* in greater measure, as His body, the Church.

The **"CHURCH IS THE PEOPLE, NOT THE STEEPLE."** It isn't *a location*. It's you and me. It's people caring for one another, watching out for one another, crying with those who cry and laughing at those who, frankly, *need to be laughed at* ... I mean, laughing *with* those who laugh.

But there's always more to uncover, discover and live into about what God's intentions are for us as "the church", as the Bride of Christ. There's always more for us to learn. And that's great, because Pastor Peter has a lot of wisdom for us on this subject. In **FIRST PETER** he has so much for us to *mine, dig into, think about, wrestle with* and come to *know* and *understand* about God's intentions for us as we discern and implement His plan about how to literally "be this kind of Missional Church" I've been describing for you. And I know that God gets excited when you and I long in our hearts to connect with what's in His heart and on His mind for us as "His Church."

ILLUSTRATION ... THE SHEEPHERDER AND THE CONSULTANT ...

One brisk morning, a shepherd in the Highlands of Scotland was out in the field with his flock. Way off in the distance, a pair of halogen headlights broke through the low-lying mist, and soon he saw shiny, new Range Rover coming down the windy road and, pulling right up beside him and the knee-high rock wall that surrounded his property and served as the fence for his sheep.

A well-dressed young man stepped out of the Range Rover in his Armani suit, his IWC wristwatch, his Burberry shirt, his REVO sunglasses, his Xenga tie, and his Bruno Mali shoes. He was "snappy" to say the least. The very least. He walked up to the shepherd and without even so much as introducing himself asked, "If I can tell you how many sheep you have in this field, will you give one of them to me?"

The shepherd looked the chap up and down, and then he looked out at his huge flock of sheep, and then he looked back at the fellow and politely said, “Sure.” A typical Scotsman. A man of few words, but pay attention, because each of them, no matter how brief, is important!

So the young man went back to his Range Rover, took out his laptop, connected to the Internet via his cell phone modem, logged onto the GOOGLE World Satellite web-site, zeroed in on the pasture in front of him, activated an infrared, wool-and-hoof recognition scanner, ran the data through an algorithm he’d written, and within seconds proudly proclaimed to the shepherd, “There are 1,156 sheep in this field.”

The shepherd was kind of shocked, but the chap indeed deciphered the *exact number* of sheep he had in his field. And so the shepherd said, “You got it spot on. So go ahead and pick out your sheep.”

So the young man snatched up the animal that caught his fancy and promptly put it into the back of his Range Rover.

The shepherd watched this with interest and said to the guy, “Okay, now if I can guess your profession, I get to take back my property that you’ve got in the back of your dandy Range Rover.”

The young man, confident that he wouldn’t be correctly identified, smiled and said, “You’re on old man.”

So the shepherd looked the man up and down a few more times, looked into the pair of eyes staring back at him from the back of the Range Rover and boldly proclaimed, “You’re a Consultant! That’s what you are. You’re a Consultant.”

The young man was stymied and asked, “Old man, how did you know that I’m a Consultant?”

“Well it wasn’t really all that hard.” “How did I know you were a Consultant?” “Well, you came here without being asked. You don’t know anything about my business. And you charged me a fee to tell me what I already knew. Now give me my dog back!”

When Peter wrote these words to his friends in Asia Minor in about 64 AD, or about 30 years after Jesus lived, died, came back to life and returned to heaven, he wasn’t a *consultant*, he was a *shepherd*. Even though he was writing from Rome, he’d been the pastor-teacher in the church in Jerusalem for many years.

And so he was all-too-familiar with the hard times these folks in Asia Minor were going through and that were about to increase. He’d walked in their shoes. He knew what it cost to follow Jesus Christ with all your heart. He was a *fisherman* who’d invited

Jesus to turn him into a *shepherd* ... and as a *shepherd* he'd been face-to-face with Jesus, the Chief Shepherd.

And now Peter longed to be used by God in the lives of the flocks who would receive this letter ... to help *equip* them, and *ground* them, and *challenge* them to move toward the maturity of faith they'd need in order to become *the church* that God wanted and needed them to become.

So do you see why we can trust Peter's words for us? And do you see how come Peter's words weren't just significant for the folks in Asia Minor 2,000 years ago, but why they're relevant to us today? Do you see how they connect with who we are, right here today in September of 2009?

Peter wasn't just a *consultant* with a few good ideas, or some slick insights into who we are and who God wants us to be as "the church." Peter was a *shepherd* who knew God intimately. And out of that intimacy came some instruction about who God wants us to be as the church ... instruction we need to explore and begin to "live into" if we're going to keep maturing as the sheep who make up the various flocks we represent here.

In *FIRST PETER 2:1-3* Peter tells us how God wants to see followers of Jesus Christ, *respond to His WORD* ... to what Peter taught about in *FIRST PETER 1:24-25* ...

.PPT 6-7 ... FIRST PETER 1:24-2:3 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

²⁴ For, "ALL FLESH IS LIKE GRASS, AND ALL ITS GLORY LIKE THE FLOWER OF GRASS. THE GRASS WITHERS, AND THE FLOWER FALLS OFF,
²⁵ BUT THE WORD OF THE LORD ENDURES FOREVER." And this is the word which was preached to you.

¹ Therefore, putting aside all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander,
² like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation,
³ if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord.

v. 1 ... **Therefore** ... at the end of *FIRST PETER 1* Peter had just taught about the *glory and eternal character of God's WORD*. Now, **therefore**, or "in light of what God's WORD says to us and means to us", Peter now says that we need to receive the WORD of God with a **certain kind of heart**. Peter's saying that when we're serious about following God and about getting into His WORD and inviting His WORD to get into us, that this will be accompanied by a willingness to pursue and take on the character and attributes of Jesus Christ so that we can do God's will.

But Peter's not only telling us what fully-devoted, maturing followers of Jesus Christ *will look like*. He's also telling us what fully-devoted, maturing followers of Jesus Christ *won't look like*. And He does this by telling us that there will be certain ways of living that after we meet Christ and begin to live in Him, that we'll need to be willing to "put aside" ... that we'll need to be willing to be "done with" ... about

which we'll be willing to say, "God, because I'm pursuing You with all my *heart*, with all my *mind*, with all my *soul*, and with all my *strength* ... there are things I'm *going to stop doing* because I can't pursue both them and You at the same time."

In v. 2 Peter says ... **like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word.** "Long for" ... is a strong word. In the *Septuagint*, which is an ancient Greek translation of *The Old Testament*, this same word is used to describe people's "deepest longing for God." In PSALM 42:1 King David used this word when he wrote, "As the deer *longs for the water brooks, so my soul longs for You, O God.*"

v. 2 ... **like newborn babies, long for** ... A healthy new baby has an *instinctive yearning* for its mother's milk. When things are right with a baby ... when it's healthy and growing, you don't have to tell a baby to *want its mother's milk*.

ILLUSTRATION ... DR. WILSON AND THE "BABY THAT WOULDN'T EAT."

v. 2 goes on ... **so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation.** Gang, the WORD of God is necessary for Christian growth and maturity. We should all **long for the pure milk of the WORD.** Christians should never get tired of the simple truths of God's Word simply presented. And who are these **newborn babies**? In a sense, we all are. Here's what Bible scholars F.B. Meyer and Wayne Grudem wrote about this truth:

.PPT 8 ...

The most advanced among us, in knowledge and attainment, are, in comparison with what they shall be, only as babes. (F.B. Meyer)

To drink the milk of the Word is to "taste" again and again what God is like, for in the hearing of the Lord's words believers experience the joy of personal fellowship with God Himself. (Wayne Grudem)

.PPT 9 ... FIRST PETER 2:1-3 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

- ¹ Therefore, putting aside all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander,
- ² like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation,
- ³ if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord.

But to "grow by the WORD," we have to receive it with a certain attitude of heart. And that's what Peter is talking about in v. 1 when he tells us to **put aside all malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander.** This is a picture of a humble, honest, heart ... of a heart that's willing **to do what the WORD of God says.**

When Peter says, **putting aside** ... he's saying, "rid yourself of this kind of living, for purity's sake." He's saying, "because of how kind Jesus Christ is to us, we have no need to engage in these behaviors."

And this list in v. 1 of things people are willing to "put aside" when they get serious about following God was a common list used in the Early Church by people who'd become serious about becoming "the church, His bride". In fact, v. 1 was often

recited at baptisms as a further profession of faith. So before the Believer went down under the water it is told that they'd say with gusto, "I choose to live for Jesus Christ, putting aside all malice, all deceit, all hypocrisy, all envy, and all slander."

.PPT 10 ...

v. 3 ... if you have tasted the kindness of the LORD ... if we have **tasted** (personally experienced) **that the Lord is gracious and kind**, then we have all the more *reason* and *responsibility* to receive the WORD of God in the enthusiastic way babies receive their mother's milk.

Peter is contrasting *these sins* and *their fruit* - which have their genesis in the world and how it lives - with the kind of fruit that begins to grow in us and out of us when we take the WORD of God into us, and then begin to live it out. Let's look more closely at these five words and the things Peter is calling us to learn and unlearn with relation to them.

.PPT 11 ...

ON OUR OWN

MALICE is the desire to cause harm to another or others, or to see somebody in pain

THE WORD OF GOD CHALLENGES US ...

To build one another up, to invest in the lives of others, to see them grow and live lives of joy and peace.

The only way to "unlearn" **malice**, is to invite Jesus Christ to change our minds and our hearts.

.PPT 12 ...

ON OUR OWN

DECEIT is the act or practice of deceiving or misleading somebody with the goal of using them for our benefit.

THE WORD OF GOD CHALLENGES US ...

To be truthful. **JOHN 1:14** says that Jesus was full of "grace and truth." Letting God's WORD instruct and guide us will make things more clear, not more confusing.

The only way to "unlearn" **deceit**, is to invite Jesus Christ to change our minds and our hearts.

.PPT 13 ...

ON OUR OWN

HYPOCRISY is the false claim to or pretense of having admirable principles, beliefs, or feelings.

THE WORD OF GOD CHALLENGES US ...

To not be two-faced posers, but to be the "real thing". To not have divided hearts or minds. To bring congruity between what we say we believe, and how we actually live and turn our inward faith outward.

The only way to “unlearn” **hypocrisy**, is to invite Jesus Christ to change our minds and our hearts.

.PPT 14 ...

ON OUR OWN

ENVY is jealous greed. It's wanting what we don't have and being willing to do almost anything to get it.

THE WORD OF GOD CHALLENGES US ...

God calls us to lives of contentment, and to not be grasping and striving all the time. Jesus put it this way in MATTHEW 6:33 ...
“Seek first the kingdom of God, and everything else you need will be given unto you as well.”

The only way to “unlearn” **envy**, is to invite Jesus Christ to change our minds and our hearts.

.PPT 15 ...

ON OUR OWN

SLANDER is the act of saying something false or malicious that damages somebody's reputation.

THE WORD OF GOD CHALLENGES US ...

Similar to “malice” ... but slander is usually done more behind someone's back, whereas malice is usually done right to their face. Malice is more an internal sin or attitude. And slander is usually more of a specific action. Malice, if not recognized and confessed as sin will often lead to slander.

The only way to “unlearn” **slander**, is to invite Jesus Christ to change our minds and our hearts.

ILLUSTRATION: SPEAKING AT FRIENDSVIEW IN 1991

The bottom line of all five sins on this list is that God calls us out of the shadows and into the Light. He calls us in His WORD to build people up, not tear them down with our **attitudes**, with our **words**, or with our **actions**. All because He knows that these are the kind of people He can best us to build His church.

.PPT 16 ...

v. 3 ... if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord. “tasted” means “tasting something for the first time and finding it so good that you desire more of it.” Peter is challenging us to seek after spiritual food. And he's saying that as we do, our character must reflect our new nature and the leading of the Holy Spirit in our lives ... both **publicly** and **privately**.

Let's wrap up by reading Peter's words in **vv. 4-8** ... words that invite us to “**come to Jesus**” and let these words travel with us, and speak to us throughout all the activities of this day ...

.PPT 17-18 ... FIRST PETER 2:4-8 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

⁴ And coming to Him as to a living stone, which has been rejected by men, but is choice [chosen] and precious in the sight of God,

⁵ 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.

⁶ For this is contained in Scripture: "BEHOLD, I LAY IN ZION A CHOICE STONE, A PRECIOUS CORNER stone, AND HE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED."

⁷ This precious value, then, is for you who believe; but for those who disbelieve, "THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED, THIS BECAME THE VERY CORNER stone,"

⁸ and, "A STONE OF STUMBLING AND A ROCK OF OFFENSE"; for they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this doom they were also appointed.

Tonight we'll explore together the "**spiritual house**" Peter talks about in v. 5 - the house God desires to build us into. We will also look more closely at what it means to be **THE CHURCH GATHERED** and **THE CHURCH SCATTERED**, and about what it means to live lives that are being sacrificed daily over to the will of God.

Come **PRAISING** and **EXPECTING!**