

A HOLY HOUSE**1 Peter 2:1-12****(Read 1 Peter 2:1-12)**

Intro: House painting, interior and exterior, was a family enterprise for my brothers, brothers in law, nieces, and nephews. We put ourselves through high school, college and grad school, and made extra spending money after we embarked on our careers by painting houses. I always found painting to be very rewarding, especially when the house we were painting was old and run down. My dad always proclaimed that a good coat of paint could cover up a multitude of sins.

One example of that was Mrs. Jones's house near Skippack, Pennsylvania and not far from my parents' home. My brother, Kent and I were in college and we had a painting business during the summer and on weekends. Mrs. Jones's house was a very large, two story, frame house with wood siding. The siding had at one time been painted white and the trim around the windows and doors and on the corners, had been a light, washed out color that in later years would have been referred to as chartreuse. I'm not sure it ever looked great, but it sure was ugly by the summer of '80. That is, what we could see was ugly, because it had been so long since the house had been painted that vines of various kinds including poison ivy and honeysuckle had grown up the walls. Not only was this unsightly, but it was also very hard on the wood if those vines began growing into the wood. Fortunately it hadn't gone so long that it was beyond repair. But it took a lot of work. Kent and I went to work tearing the vines off the walls and scraping down all the wood. For weeks we scraped and sanded and primed. Eventually we applied two coats of Benjamin Moore Williamsburg Colors which were all the rage in the late '70s and early '80s. We painted the walls with a deep beige, and the trim with a very rich burgundy. The once seemingly dilapidated house almost looked like a mansion when we were finished. We were sinfully proud of our work as we stood back and looked at our handiwork. We had restored an old house to a semblance of its former glory and Mrs. Jones was very pleased with our work. I wish I had a photo of that house but it was 25 years, at least, before cell phone cameras and we just didn't carry a camera with us.

Like Mrs. Jones's house, the church needs restoration. We need to remove the vines that have grown over us before irreparable damage occurs. We have become faded and lackluster and we need to return to our former holiness. We need to be the holy house God intended.

Peter helps us with this process here in our text. The first thing he points out is . . .

Our Foundation

- What is out of view is, more often than not, the most important thing. A few years ago our neighbors noticed their concrete patio on the back of their house had settled and called in a leveling contractor to lift it back up. The contractor began pumping foam under the patio and he pumped and pumped and pumped – and the patio, which didn't have that far to go to level, still had not moved. That was when my other neighbor, who, being nose, had been skeptically watching the operation, and suggested that they look at what might be happening to the basement wall beneath the patio. Sure enough, when they went to the basement, they saw that instead of lifting the patio, the foam had pushed the basement wall over about three feet at the top and it was in imminent danger of collapsing. The repair of that wall and the fact that the patio had to be replaced took three months and tens of thousands of dollars. Another friend of mine did not have good drainage around his house and when a long rainy spell set in, his basement wall collapsed inward and threatened the structural integrity of his home. It, too, cost many thousands of dollars and many sleepless nights.
- What is seemingly out of view can be the most damaging and Peter makes sure we don't overlook it. So he begins with, *So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander.* 1 Peter 2:1. The other day I posted a quote from Alan Simpson's eulogy at George H. W. Bush's funeral on Facebook. He said, *Hatred corrodes the container it's carried in.* Many of my Facebook friends heartily agreed with it. One person, certainly agreed with it, but also added, *Gossip does the same thing.* I couldn't agree more. Hatred and gossip and the other things that Peter mentioned here are all under the radar sins that are just as damaging because they erode our holiness and damage our witness. They might not be easily visible but, as sins go, they are just as hellish.
- When I was a younger man, not just when I was in my teens but when I was in my 20s and 30s and 40s, I struggled, as every Christ Follower does, with the outward sins. I had to consciously control my roving eyes that could easily be distracted by an attractive female who was not my wife. I needed to be careful about what

I said, because I knew all the words that could turn the air blue. I had to restrain my anger when the easy response to provocation would have been a knuckle sandwich. I didn't smoke or chew or go with girls that do. These are examples of just some of the outward sins. They are damaging to our soul and they are damaging to our witness.

- But there are many inward sins. The kind that, like the foam that practically destroyed Scott and Kathy's house, do their dirty work under the surface. Peter points out some, but definitely not all, of them here when he refers to malice and deceit and hypocrisy and envy and slander. Oh, come on Peter! I was just thinking that stuff, let me just savor it a bit. Let me just ponder how good it would be to see that proud peacock fall on his face. And what they don't know, won't hurt them, right?! And a little white lie isn't really a lie, right?! Let me just soak in a little jealousy as I envy my neighbor who has a bigger house or a nicer car, or a larger paycheck. And, it's not gossip if it is true, right?! WRONG!
- In the same way hatred corrodes like a caustic acid, all the quiet sins like Peter's list rot away at the Christ Follower's soul until they begin to crumble like a rain soaked basement wall – it's under the surface but terribly damaging and dangerous.
- Instead . . .

Let's be Living Stones

- Like Jesus, we might be rejected by society but we are precious to God. In fact Peter says we are chosen and precious (v. 4). Jesus is the cornerstone and we are built in around to make a sure foundation and solid wall and a holy house.
- It's good to be a rock. Kathy is my rock. She encourages me and loves me and makes me feel like a million bucks even when I feel like a worn out dollar bill. Southern Civil War General Thomas Jackson was known as Stonewall Jackson because of his wisdom and courage in battle. I kind of knew the story, but, just to verify, I Googled it and found on the National Park website that, Jackson "got his nickname at the Battle of Bull Run in Virginia. During the gunfire and confusion of the battle, Confederate Gen. Barnard E. Bee said, "*There is Jackson standing like a stone wall.*" The soldiers under his command came to admire his stubborn courage and started calling him "Stonewall" Jackson." A rock wall gives confidence and there is strength in numbers.
- So it's important that we are not lone rocks. A rock by itself is just a place to stub a toe or ruin a mower blade. We have a big rock in our front yard that was put there by the previous owners as an ornament and I guess it looks kinda nice and the kids like climbing on it. But, really, it's a pain! I have to weed whack around it and all it does is just sit there. I really should get rid of it. It's worthless by itself. Rocks just by themselves are useless. William Barclay says, "*The Christian is likened to a living stone and the Church to a living edifice into which he is built. Clearly that means that Christianity is community; the individual Christian finds his true place only when he is built into that edifice. "Solitary religion" is ruled out as an impossibility. C. E. B. Cranfield writes: "The free-lance Christian, who would be a Christian but is too superior to belong to the visible Church upon earth in one of its forms, is simply a contradiction in terms."* Together we make a holy house.
- Better yet, in verse 9 Peter says we are . . .

A chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession

- We aren't just any old wall stacked up against any old cornerstone – we are stones in a wall that proclaims the excellencies of the true Cornerstone. WE are HIS people! I want to focus on that priesthood as I close this out.
- We are a priesthood and with that come HUGE responsibilities. This very passage is where the Christian concept of the priesthood of all believers comes from. In the Old Testament the priest is the one who brought the sacrifices of himself and his people to the Lord. He was set apart for a holy mission and he was special. Jesus ushered in a new way. He did a new thing as the text Gary read points out. We're all priests. Yes – all of us! If we are truly followers of Jesus, we are priests. We all get to bring a sacrifice of praise. By the fact that Jesus's work on the Cross opened the way into the Holy of Holies, we as priests can have access to God and bring others to experience that same access.

- We have been called out of darkness into his marvelous light. Where once we were not his people, we are now God's people; and once we had not received mercy, but now we have received mercy. That needs to be passed on. We need to do it. That's what a holy priesthood is for.

Conclusion: How? Live like Jesus and be like Jesus and be Jesus. That means we go back to where we started. Watch the outward stuff and watch the inward stuff. Eugene Peterson paraphrases the closing verses of our text like this, *Friends, this world is not your home, so don't make yourselves cozy in it. Don't indulge your ego at the expense of your soul. Live an exemplary life in your neighborhood so that your actions will refute their prejudices. Then they'll be won over to God's side and be there to join in the celebration when he arrives.* 1 Peter 2:11-12 (The Message). This world might not be our home, but we can be a holy house in the midst of it. Let's make our holy house a welcoming place. Amen.