

“Like Living Stones”

1 Peter 2:5

Hello Dear Listeners;

Last week on this program we considered what the bible says about the marks or characteristics of a true and faithful church. We discovered the importance of preaching the true gospel as well as the pure administration of the sacraments as Christ has instituted them. Then too we found the bible stressing the exercise of what is known as church discipline for correcting and punishing sins.

Yet you and I might well find such a church but that does not necessarily mean its members are all faithful, living, loving and obedient servants of Christ. So today lets examine what the bible says ought to characterize the lives of faithful members of Christ’s church.

It should be evident to all that faithful members of Christ’s church will be devoted to Him. They surely will show in thought and word and deed that they believe in him who bought them by his blood. They will confess to know him as their Savior and honour him as their Lord and King. When the apostle Paul writes about God’s ‘blueprint’ for Christian living in his letter to the Colossians we hear him saying things like this:

“Since then you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.” ch. 3:1)

Then he goes on to direct his hearers to “*put to death*” all kinds of awful things that belong to one’s sinful human nature. That “putting to death” involves radical, Christian action in which a Christian fights against things like “*sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which*” says Paul, “*is idolatry.*” (v. 5.) Christians, says Paul, must “*rid*” themselves of all kinds of ‘hard pricklies’ like “*anger, rage, malice, slander and filthy*

language.” (v. 8) Bound together in bonds of love and in fellowship with Christ and his church they won't dabble in lies but instead they'll spend time cherishing what amounts to a whole new 'wardrobe' of “*compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience*” (v. 12). Do they sometimes have grievances against one another, they will be gracious and forgiving, knowing the Christ has forgiven their own many sins.

A little further on in the chapter Paul urges them to “*let the peace of Christ rule*” in their hearts. Why is that? It is because as members of one body they were called to peace!

Do they hear the Word of God proclaimed to them every Lord's Day? Then, says Paul, “ *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom...*” (v. 16)

No it isn't as if Paul thought this kind of Christian behaviour would dominate a person's character and lifestyle through some kind of mysterious, process of spiritual osmosis! Earlier, in chapter two of this letter he said, “ *So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.*” (ch. 2: 6, 7).

To live “in Christ” is a lifelong process of cherishing that intimate fellowship a Christian has with Christ by means of a living faith. It's not just living a decent life while keeping one's nose clean. It isn't a commitment to get rid of some of the rough edges that begin to characterize the life of one who lives in the midst of a broken, calloused, sinful world. It means, as a prophet of the Old Testament said many years ago, “ *Take hold of God and pull.*” That is, use all the means God makes available to fight what the Spirit elsewhere calls “ *the good fight of the faith.*”

For let's face it, you and I just can't do it on our own. O, we can have lofty, even godly ambitions to live a right and holy, productive Christian life. But if we fail to cling to Jesus Christ and his word- and if we fail to be constant in prayer we will, in time resemble one of the devil's partners rather than living as a genuine Christian.

In the first few chapters of the Book of Revelation the Holy Spirit testifies that a church might be faithful in maintaining the true doctrine of salvation, not tolerating any kind of wickedness while working hard and persevering in the truth and yet... fail God's test of love. Yes, of "*first love*" which is that shining, sparkling love that often is there even at the beginning of a beautiful human relationship. It was found in abundance, practised by the church in Jerusalem right after the outpouring of Christ's Holy Spirit on them. But it is this love that was missing in the church of Ephesus so that the Spirit, addressing them in Revelation 2 had to warn them that unless they repented he would come and "remove" their "lampstand" which was tantamount to saying, "*you will have lost your right to be called a church of Christ!*"

The sad fact is that churches once founded on the infallible word of God can fall into disrepair of sorts. A church as a whole can end up going through the motions of faith. That's why in other places such as 1 Peter 2:5 you hear that apostle urging his readers to keep coming to him whom Peter calls, (on the basis of God's own word) "*the living stone*" (1 Peter 2:4, cf. Psalm 118: 22, 23) .

This "stone" who is precious to God the Father was rejected by men . But now, says Peter, "*As you come to him..... you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ*" (v. 5)

Jesus Christ, the “living stone” or, as he’s portrayed in Scripture as well, the “Cornerstone” is “living” by virtue of his resurrection from the dead. But now that same resurrection enlivens the “stones” that come to him and are built up by him and are so close to him. They’re not just a heap of gravel or debris. They are part of Christ’s spiritual house. Together they form a significant unity.

No these spiritual stones are not supermen and superwomen. Yet in Jesus Christ they are world-beaters of sorts. The apostle Paul in Romans 8:37 says that in fellowship with Jesus Christ they are “more than conquerors”.

Yet, though they are committed to serving their Master and are equipped to offer resistance to the devil and a sin-filled, inflexible world “great weakness remains in them. The churches that sponsor this program subscribe to a Form for the celebration of the Lord’s Supper in which her members admit that of themselves, that is, in their old sinful human nature, they are “dead”. They say, “ *We do not have perfect faith and we do not serve God with such zeal as he requires. Daily we have to contend with the weakness of our faith and with the evil desires of our flesh.*”

Yet they do not leave it at that. Together with other sincere Christians they are “*heartily sorry for these shortcomings and desire to fight against their unbelief and to live according to all the commandments of God.*”

They are no different from King David, who, though he is called a “man after God’s heart” in the bible, nevertheless committed some grave sins, conspiring to put his neighbour Uriah to death and committing adultery with that man’s wife. Yet he didn’t shrug off those sins but instead confessed them to his God. He showed genuine humility as he asked the Lord to blot out his transgressions and *create in him a new heart.* (Psalm 51: 1, 10).

The church of Christ will have a constant battle against this world, swollen with pride, the devil and one's own sinful flesh. But that's precisely why the church's members make their way to a faithful church-assembly every Sunday morning and perhaps in the afternoon or evening as well. They realize that their faith needs bolstering, their lives need renewing, their minds need focussing on Jesus Christ.

They are blessed in knowing the Holy Spirit, working powerfully by means of His precious Word is there for them. They know, even as the Spirit promised long ago,

The Lord will fulfill his purpose for me;
Your love, O Lord, endures forever-

So with David and all true Christians they will plead, (O Lord) do not abandon the works of your hands. For Christ's sake, Amen and Thank you so much for listening.