

Session 3: The Testimony of Our Hope

QUESTION 1:

*When have you bought something
based on a friend's recommendation?*



THE POINT

Our hope in Christ points others to Him.

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

“If God loved me, He would not have treated me this way.” Charlotte Elliott often said this because poor health had rendered her disabled.

When Dr. Cesar Malan, a Swiss minister, visited her family home in 1922, he spoke with Charlotte about her condition. His concern, coupled with his own faith, led to a breakthrough. He told her the cure for her misery was the very faith she despised. He said, “Give yourself to God just as you are now, with your fightings and fears, hates and loves, pride and shame.”

Charlotte turned to God and experienced new life in Christ that very day. As she grew in her walk with the Lord, she studied His Word and began to write hymns, the most famous of which detailed that pivotal day in her life: “Just as I am without one plea, But that Thy blood was shed for me, And that Thou bidst me come to Thee, O Lamb of God, I come, I come!”¹

Dr. Malan’s hope pointed Charlotte to a Living Hope, and our hope can point others to Christ too. A life lived in Christ is a great “recommendation” to others to come to Him.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

1 PETER 2:4-6

⁴ As you come to him, a living stone—rejected by people but chosen and honored by God—
⁵ you yourselves, as living stones, a spiritual house, are being built to be a holy priesthood
to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. ⁶ For it stands in
Scripture: See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and honored cornerstone, and the one who
believes in him will never be put to shame.

Our salvation was secured once and for all in Christ, so Peter's phrase "as you come to him" is not a reference to the initial salvation decision; rather, it is a picture of the children of God constantly drawing near and coming into His presence. Under the Old Testament sacrificial system, only priests had the privilege of coming into God's presence to offer sacrifices, but under the new covenant, all believers can enter into that sacred place. We "are being built to be a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God."

Believers are also being built into a spiritual house. In the Old Testament, the temple and specifically the holy of holies was the dwelling place of God among His people; but now, we *are* that dwelling!

QUESTION 2:

Why is the image of "living stones" a good picture for those of us in the church?

The Jewish people called out to God as their rock and salvation (see Psalm 18:2; 62:2), and now Jesus was identified as the chief cornerstone of this spiritual house. Jesus is the foundation of the church who provides its

stability, security, and strength. The cornerstone was crucial to a building's overall structure. It was the main foundation stone in ancient buildings, and tied everything together as the place where walls would meet; or it served as the keystone in the center of an arch. In both cases, the cornerstone was the stabilizing stone in the structure. The body of Christ is not held together by preferences, creeds, politics, tradition, culture, a constitution and bylaws, or denominational ties. It is held together by the Chief Cornerstone that is Jesus Christ. There is stability because Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever. His church holds an unchanging message in changing times.

Because the foundation is rock solid, believers will never be disappointed or put to shame. We have no regret or remorse after making the decision to follow Christ. D. J. Kenyon wrote, "Peter is saying this for our encouragement that once our attitude toward this chief, elect, precious Cornerstone is established there will never be occasion to regret our choice or blush at any circumstance, because our faithful Lord does not leave us abandoned to our own resources. One who centers his life in Christ will never have reason to regret his choice."²

1 PETER 2:7-10

⁷ So honor will come to you who believe; but for the unbelieving, The stone that the builders rejected—this one has become the cornerstone, ⁸ and A stone to stumble over, and a rock to trip over. They stumble because they disobey the word; they were destined for this. ⁹ But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his possession, so that you may proclaim the praises of the one who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. ¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

In ancient Jerusalem, Herod built the tower of Antonia as the headquarters of the Roman government. Under Herod's orders, quarrymen cut stones from the bedrock of Mount Moriah to build the fortress as well as the temple, the temple platform, and the colonnade on the temple mount. Antonia's fortress stood on the northern end of the temple courtyard and spread across four large towers. Jesus was in one of these towers when Pilate brought Him before the people as they shouted for the release of Barabbas (see Mark 15:6-15; John 19:13).

Down below this tower along the western wall is a sidewalk that probably ran through a market where daily commerce and trade commenced. A massive hewn stone sits where the sidewalk ends. The stone had been chiseled in places, but for some reason the builders rejected it and cast it aside.

Jesus Himself was probably standing near this rock when He quoted Psalm 118:22-23: " 'Have you never read in the Scriptures: The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This is what the Lord has done and it is wonderful in our eyes?' " (Matthew 21:42). Just days later, He would be rejected by His own people and condemned to death in the Antonia fortress right above this rock.

QUESTION 3:

How do people stumble over Jesus today?

Others may reject Christ, but believers stand confidently because of who we are in Christ. Peter gave descriptions of the people of God who have found refuge in the Rock of salvation:

- ▶ **A Chosen Race.** God chose Israel not on the basis of their size or merit, but out of His great love (see Deuteronomy 7:7-9). He also has chosen us because of His great grace and love (see John 15:16; Ephesians 2:8-10).
- ▶ **A Royal Priesthood.** We who are in Christ are of a completely new line: we are people of the new covenant. We have been redeemed by the blood of Christ, who is both our faithful High Priest (see Hebrews 2:17) and King of kings (see Revelation 19:16).
- ▶ **A Holy Nation.** As we saw in the previous session, we are called to holiness because God is holy.
- ▶ **A People for His Possession.** We have a personal relationship with Christ. We are His, and no one can take us from Him (see John 10:27-30; Romans 8:31-39).

WHO WE ARE IN CHRIST

Consider how 1 Peter 2:9 describes believers.

Draw a line from each descriptor to the correct corresponding description.

A chosen race

People set apart to do good

A royal priesthood

Redeemed people for use by God

A holy nation

Royalty who share the gospel

A people for His possession

A new clan with a spiritual calling

Write your response to Peter's description of us as Christians.

1 PETER 2:11-15

¹¹ Dear friends, I urge you as strangers and exiles to abstain from sinful desires that wage war against the soul. ¹² Conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles, so that when they slander you as evildoers, they will observe your good works and will glorify God on the day he visits. ¹³ Submit to every human authority because of the Lord, whether to the emperor as the supreme authority ¹⁴ or to governors as those sent out by him to punish those who do what is evil and to praise those who do what is good. ¹⁵ For it is God's will that you silence the ignorance of foolish people by doing good.

Our walk must match our talk. These verses deal with the believer's behavior in a pagan world, where the environment may not be so friendly or comfortable for Christians. If we claim to be Christ-followers, then we must live His life before this world. "Because as He is, so also are we in this world" (1 John 4:17).

QUESTION 4:

What do these verses teach us about our responsibilities as Christ-followers?

Christians are to represent Christ in everything we do—from paying our bills to playing sports to raising our kids. Peter noted three ways we can exemplify Christ.

1. Abstain from sinful desires. We bear personal responsibility for our actions; therefore, we should remove ourselves from certain influences and situations. It is critical for us to be on guard against things that war against us. Our good works and godly living will serve to point others to the One who has saved us and set us on a new course.


2. Submit to authority. A governmental system may be corrupt, but God has ordained the institution of government for the good of its citizens. Therefore, when we submit ourselves to delegated power, we submit to God. He allows a watching world to gain insight into His ways because of how His people maintain honesty and integrity.

3. Do good. "For it is God's will that you silence the ignorance of foolish people by doing good." People often question what God's will is for their life, and yet it's spelled out here in black and white: do good. We don't silence our critics by arguing or shouting. We shut them down by our good works.

We are aliens and strangers—Christians living in a non-Christian world—and we are responsible to live in such a way as to cause nonbelievers to consider the goodness and glory of our God.

QUESTION 5

What opportunities do we have to express our hope to those who need to hear about it?

A woman with long brown hair, wearing a pink leather jacket and matching pants, stands in a modern building. The walls are made of large, light-colored stone tiles. Above her, a complex neon light installation in shades of pink and white creates abstract, swirling patterns. The lighting is soft and modern.

“Believers are living stones in His building.
Each time someone trusts Christ,
another stone is quarried out of the pit of sin
and cemented by grace into the building.”

WARREN WIERSBE

LIVE IT OUT

How will you live out your hope to a watching world?

- ▶ **Be honorable.** Start your day by asking the Lord to make you mindful of ways you can honor Him as you go through your day, no matter how simple or insignificant you may think the task is. Small steps of obedience lead to a long path of godliness.
- ▶ **Be submissive.** Is there a person or agency of authority that you've not lovingly submitted yourself to as unto the Lord? Confess this to the Lord and seek to make it right with that person or group as soon as possible.
- ▶ **Be outspoken.** Someone in your circle of influence needs to know of your hope in Christ. Think of a tangible good that you can do for someone who may be ignorant or critical toward the gospel. Show the love of Christ to them with no strings attached!

The life we live in Christ should not be a point of controversy or contention, and our reputations never should stand in the way of the gospel. **Our hope should point others to Christ.**

1. Robert J. Morgan, *Then Sings My Soul: 150 of the World's Greatest Hymns Stories* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2003), 112-113.
 2. D. J. Kenyon, *He That Will Love Life* (Harrisburg, PA: Christian Publications Inc., 1968), 102.