

Homiletics Analysis: 1 Peter 2

Content & Intent

This Text — Content:

First Peter 2 moves through three distinct but interconnected movements. The chapter opens (vv. 1–3) with an imperative to rid the community of relational vices and to crave “pure spiritual milk” — the word of God — as newborns crave nourishment, grounding this hunger in the fact that they have already tasted the Lord’s goodness. The second movement (vv. 4–12) develops a dense theological argument: believers are living stones being built into a spiritual house around the living cornerstone, Christ himself — rejected by men but chosen and precious before God. This identity as a chosen race, royal priesthood, and holy nation entails a calling to declare God’s excellencies and to live honorably among the Gentiles so that even those who slander them may ultimately glorify God. The third movement (vv. 13–25) pivots to concrete social submission: submission to governing authorities, to masters (including unjust ones), and — as the culminating rationale — to the pattern of Christ’s own suffering, who bore sins in his body on the tree so that believers might die to sin and live to righteousness, and who, as the Shepherd and Overseer of their souls, has brought them home from their wandering.

This Text — Intent:

God is seeking to accomplish a double stabilization in his readers: identity stabilization and behavioral stabilization. Scattered, marginalized, and socially vulnerable believers are in danger of either losing their grip on who they are in Christ or of living in ways that confirm the slanders leveled against them. Through this chapter, God is calling his people to stand firm in a dignity they did not earn — chosen, royal, priestly, belonging to God — and to let that dignity express itself not in social defiance or status-seeking but in a pattern of ordered, humble, honorable living that mirrors the self-giving of Christ himself. The intent is not merely doctrinal clarification but the transformation of how these people carry themselves in a world that does not want them.

Subject Sentence: Chosen and precious in Christ, believers live as God’s holy nation among the nations.

Primary Claim: God is calling his marginalized, slandered people to inhabit their new identity — living stones, royal priests, a people belonging to God — so fully and concretely that their ordered, Christ-patterned lives silence accusation and draw outsiders to glorify God.

Interpretive Evaluation

The nature of “spiritual milk” (v. 2): A minor but recurring debate concerns whether *logikon adolon gala* (“pure spiritual milk”) refers to the word of God/Scripture, to the eucharist, or more broadly to spiritual nourishment. Some patristic and Roman Catholic readers have seen a eucharistic reference here, connecting the chapter’s opening to the sacramental life of the community newly initiated through baptism. The Reformed reading — supported by the explicit parallel to “the word of the Lord” in the preceding chapter (1:23–25) and by the absence of any eucharistic context in the immediate passage — correctly identifies this as the word of God preached and received. The eucharistic reading imports a sacramental framework not present in the text. The word connection is the load-bearing one: as 1:23 grounds new birth in the living word, 2:2 calls for continued growth through the same living word.

The “priesthood” of all believers (vv. 4–10): Lutheran and Baptist traditions have championed the “priesthood of all believers” from this passage as a corrective to clerical hierarchy. The text does support a genuine universal priesthood — all believers are constituted as a royal priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices and declare God’s excellencies. However, some applications overread the passage in an individualistic direction, as though the priesthood means every believer has unmediated, autonomous access to interpret Scripture and worship independently of any community structure. The text constitutes a *corporate* priesthood — “you [plural] are a royal priesthood, a holy nation” — not a collection of individual priests. The Reformed reading appropriately affirms the universal priesthood while locating it within the covenant community, not as a charter for individualism. The Petrine priesthood is corporate, vocational, and missiological (to declare God’s excellencies), not primarily a statement about hermeneutical autonomy.

The “living cornerstone” and the use of Old Testament citations (vv. 6–8): Peter’s dense catena of Old Testament texts (Isaiah 28:16; Psalm 118:22; Isaiah 8:14) raises questions about the nature of Old Testament typology and Christological fulfillment. Dispensational readers sometimes resist the straightforward identification of the church as the heir of Israel’s covenantal identity language (v. 9: “chosen race, royal priesthood, holy nation”), preferring to hold Israel and church in separate tracks. The text, however, explicitly and without qualification transfers this identity language to the assembled community of believers in Christ — the very transfer point that is the argument of vv. 4–10. Peter is not creating an analogy; he is making a direct claim about who these people now are in light of Christ. The Reformed reading of Christological fulfillment and covenantal continuity (the church as the renewed and enlarged covenant people) best accounts for the argument’s structure. The Dispensational reading requires inserting a partition into the text that the text itself does not acknowledge.

Submission to masters including unjust ones (vv. 18–20): This passage has generated significant pastoral and ethical controversy, particularly in light of the history of its misuse

to counsel those in situations of abuse or exploitation to remain passive. Two distinct issues must be separated. First, the exegetical issue: the text is addressed to *oiketai* (household servants/slaves in the Greco-Roman context), not to all believers in all relationships of authority — the specific social location matters. Second, the hermeneutical issue: the text addresses the question of how believers bear witness under social constraints they cannot immediately change, not the question of whether all forms of authority are to be obeyed without limit. The Reformed reading recognizes (a) the specific address to those with no legal exit from their situation, (b) the Christological rationale (bearing unjust suffering as Christ bore unjust suffering), and (c) the broader biblical framework in which unjust authority has limits (Acts 5:29). Weaponizing this passage to silence victims of genuine abuse represents a catastrophic homiletical failure, not a faithful application. The text is about dignified, Christ-patterned endurance by those whose witness is at stake — not a mandate for passivity in the face of harm.

The atonement in verse 24: Peter’s statement that Christ “bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness” is a direct statement of substitutionary atonement. Some Wesleyan and moral influence readings have sought to read Christ’s suffering here primarily as moral exemplar — the focus being on the pattern of Christ’s endurance as a model for the servants addressed. The exemplary element is genuinely present (v. 21: “leaving you an example”). However, the substitutionary weight of v. 24 (“he himself bore our sins,” “by his wounds you have been healed”) cannot be reduced to exemplarism without amputating the text’s explicit claims. The example functions only because the atonement is prior — Christ’s endurance of unjust suffering is the pattern *because* his bearing of sin accomplished what ours cannot. The Reformed reading correctly holds both: Christ is both Substitute and Example, and the Example derives its power from the Substitution, not the reverse.

Key Canonical Support

- **Exodus 19:5–6** — The original constitution of Israel as “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” at Sinai; Peter explicitly transfers this covenantal identity to the church in Christ, grounding the corporate identity claim of vv. 9–10 in the Mosaic covenant’s language of election and vocation.
- **Isaiah 28:16 / Psalm 118:22 / Isaiah 8:14** — The Old Testament texts Peter assembles in vv. 6–8 to demonstrate that Christ as cornerstone was always the anticipated center of God’s building project — both the foundation of belief and the stone of offense for unbelief; the catena shows this is not a contingency plan but the appointed purpose.
- **Isaiah 53:4–6** — The Suffering Servant passage that underlies Peter’s atonement language in vv. 24–25 (“by his wounds you have been healed,” “you were straying like sheep”); the Servant’s substitutionary bearing of sin and restoring of the wandering is the theological ground on which Peter stands.

- **Romans 12:1–2** — The “spiritual worship” of offering one’s body as a living sacrifice parallels Peter’s “spiritual sacrifices” in v. 5; both passages constitute the Christian community’s priestly vocation as a whole-life offering, not a ritual category.
- **Hebrews 13:15–16** — The identification of “spiritual sacrifices” (praise and doing good) that the universal priesthood offers; corroborates Peter’s understanding that the priestly vocation of the new covenant community is missiological and ethical, not ceremonial.

Aim: To anchor believers so deeply in their God-given identity as chosen, royal, priestly people that their lives — including their suffering and submission — become a coherent, Christ-patterned witness that both silences slander and invites outsiders to glorify God.

Content Table

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
2:1	Command to put away five relational vices: malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, slander	<i>apothemenoi</i> — aorist participle, decisive laying aside; these vices directly undermine the community’s corporate witness
2:2	Command to crave “pure spiritual milk” for growth unto salvation	Newborn metaphor; <i>logikon adolon gala</i> — pure/unadulterated rational/word milk; growth is the expected trajectory
2:3	Grounding of the craving: “if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good”	Allusion to Psalm 34:8; tasting precedes craving — experience of grace motivates continued pursuit
2:4	Coming to Christ as the “living stone” — rejected by men, chosen and precious before God	The contrast between human rejection and divine election introduces the cornerstone argument
2:5	Believers as “living stones” built into a spiritual house, a holy priesthood offering spiritual sacrifices	Corporate construction metaphor; the identity flows from connection to the cornerstone
2:6	Isaiah 28:16 citation: the chosen, precious	The elect who believe share in the stone’s dignity; non-

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
	cornerstone; belief in him leads to no shame	shame is the antithesis of their current social experience
2:7	The stone rejected by builders has become the cornerstone (Psalm 118:22); this honor belongs to those who believe	<i>timē</i> — honor/precious; what the world has rejected, God has made the center; believers share in this inversion
2:8	Isaiah 8:14 citation: the stone of stumbling and rock of offense for those who disobey the word	Unbelief is not merely error but disobedience; stumbling is their appointed end (<i>eis ho kai etethēsan</i>) — divine sovereignty over rejection
2:9	The identity declarations: chosen race, royal priesthood, holy nation, people for God’s own possession	Transfer of Exodus 19:5–6 and Isaiah 43:20–21 language to the church; the purpose clause: to declare God’s excellencies
2:10	Former non-people now God’s people; former without mercy now recipients of mercy	Hosea 1–2 allusion; the transformation is total and recent — “now” marks the decisive turn
2:11	Address as “beloved aliens and strangers”; urge to abstain from fleshly desires that war against the soul	Pastoral address grounds the exhortation; the warfare is internal before it is external
2:12	Keep honorable conduct among Gentiles so that slanders become glorification of God on the day of visitation	The missiological vision: the witness of a well-ordered life converts accusation into doxology
2:13–14	Submit to every human institution — emperor, governors — for the Lord’s sake; their role: punish evil, praise good	The submission is instrumental (<i>dia ton Kyrion</i>) and purposive — not absolute but ordered toward social witness
2:15	Doing good silences the ignorance of foolish people — this is God’s will	The specific divine purpose behind honorable conduct; “ignorance” frames the accusers as uninformed, not

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2:16	Freedom is not a cover for evil; live as servants of God	necessarily malicious The paradox of Christian freedom: free and yet servants; freedom that produces license destroys witness
2:17	Four-part summary imperative: honor all, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the emperor	Chiastic structure honors the emperor at the same level as “all” but below God; fear is reserved for God alone
2:18	Household servants to submit to masters — good and gentle, and also to the unjust/crooked	Extends submission to the hardest case; <i>skoliois</i> (crooked) names the moral reality without euphemism
2:19–20	Bearing unjust suffering with God-consciousness (<i>syneidēsin Theou</i>) is grace; suffering for doing good and enduring is grace	<i>charis</i> (grace/favor) appears twice; the grounding of patience is not stoic endurance but awareness of God
2:21	“To this you were called” — Christ’s suffering is both the precedent and the pattern, leaving an <i>hypogrammon</i> (example) to follow	The calling is suffering-shaped; <i>hypogrammon</i> is a writing copy for children to trace — the image is pedagogical and concrete
2:22	Christ committed no sin, no deceit was in his mouth	Isaiah 53:9 citation; his sinlessness is essential — he suffers as the innocent one
2:23	He did not revile or threaten when suffering; he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly	The behavioral pattern: non-retaliation grounded in active trust in divine justice, not passivity or resignation
2:24	He bore our sins in his body on the tree; we might die to sin and live to righteousness; by his wounds we are healed	Isaiah 53:4–5 language; substitutionary atonement is explicit; the purpose clause frames the cross as the basis for new life
2:25	“You were straying like sheep” but have now	Isaiah 53:6 language; the Shepherd/Overseer title

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
	returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls	(<i>Poimēna kai Episkopon</i>) closes the passage with pastoral assurance

Divisions Table

Division	Verses	Label
1	2:1–3	Craving the Word: the appetite of the new birth
2	2:4–10	Living Stones: identity constituted by union with the cornerstone
3	2:11–12	Aliens on Mission: honorable conduct as witness among the nations
4	2:13–17	Ordered Lives: submission to authority as God-willed witness
5	2:18–25	Christ-Patterned Endurance: suffering servants and their suffering Lord

Subject Sentence & Primary Claim (*restated*)

Subject Sentence: Chosen and precious in Christ, believers live as God’s holy nation among the nations.

Primary Claim: God is calling his marginalized, slandered people to inhabit their new identity — living stones, royal priests, a people belonging to God — so fully and concretely that their ordered, Christ-patterned lives silence accusation and draw outsiders to glorify God.

Applications (Five)

1. You are not who your circumstances say you are. [Mind/Belief] The believers Peter addresses are scattered, marginal, and slandered — their social location tells them they are nobodies. Peter’s identity declarations in vv. 9–10 are not encouragements; they are announcements. You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people

belonging to God — not because of what you have achieved or who acknowledges you, but because of what God has spoken over you in Christ. Many believers functionally live out of the identity their culture assigns them — defined by their failures, their social standing, their family's verdict, their past. This passage calls for a root-level reorientation: begin the day by inhabiting who God says you are before you engage who the world says you are. The stone rejected by the builders is the cornerstone. What has been rejected and named worthless by human judgment has been chosen and declared precious by God. The Christian's identity is not negotiable and not socially constructed — it is divinely declared.

2. The word of God is not a resource to consult — it is milk to crave. [Affections/Worship]

Peter does not command believers to read Scripture or to attend to the word — he commands them to crave it with the urgency of a newborn who has nothing else sustaining life and knows it. This is an affections command. The question this passage forces is not “do you read the Bible?” but “do you want it?” — and not merely “do you want it when you're in crisis?” but “does the goodness you have already tasted in Christ produce in you an ongoing, intensifying appetite for more?” A Christian who reads Scripture dutifully but without hunger has not yet connected the milk of the word to the goodness of the Lord they have tasted. The medicine for spiritual dullness to Scripture is not guilt over discipline failures but renewed meditation on what God has already done — taste what the Lord is like, and the craving follows. Pursue the word not as a requirement to satisfy but as nourishment to seek.

3. Your ordered, honorable life is itself a form of mission. [Will/Behavior] Peter's missiological vision in v. 12 is striking: it is not primarily your evangelistic conversations or your gospel presentations that will bring outsiders to glorify God — it is the visible quality of your conduct among them over time. Specifically, the good works that pagans currently use as the occasion for slander will become, on the day of visitation, the evidence that compels their praise of God. This means that how you conduct yourself at work under a difficult employer, how you treat neighbors who are watching you, how you engage civic life and community relationships — these are not preludes to your witness; they are your witness. Identify one concrete domain of your life where your conduct has been shaped more by self-interest or social pressure than by the call to honorable living among those who are watching. Bring that domain under the discipline of this passage's vision.

4. Christian freedom is always freedom-in-order, never freedom-from-order.

[Mind/Belief] Verse 16 delivers one of Scripture's sharpest paradoxes: “Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as God's servants.” The freedom Christ purchases is real — believers are genuinely free from the tyranny of sin, the condemnation of law, and the verdict of human opinion. But this freedom expresses itself as ordered service, not as the dismantling of social structures. The temptation in every generation is to treat Christian liberty as the license to opt out of any obligation that chafes — to the governing authority, to the employer, to the community — on the grounds that “I am free in Christ.” Peter names this directly as a misuse of freedom. Freedom that produces disorder is not Christian freedom — it is freedom weaponized for self-will. The

marker of genuine Christian freedom is that it produces greater, not lesser, capacity for ordered, willing service.

5. Non-retaliation is not passivity — it is active trust in divine justice.

[Affections/Worship] Peter's description of Christ's behavior under unjust suffering in v. 23 is precise: "When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly." The "but" is the hinge — non-retaliation is not the absence of action but the presence of a specific act: the active, ongoing entrustment of one's case to the God who will judge rightly. This is the pattern believers are called to trace. When you are treated unjustly — slandered, exploited, dismissed — the options are not limited to retaliation or resigned passivity. There is a third way: deliberately, concretely entrusting the injustice to God, trusting that no wrong done against you will escape his notice or evade his justice. This requires genuine confidence in God's character as judge — and it is that confidence, not mere willpower, that makes non-retaliation possible without bitterness.

Theological Importance

Theological Importance: First Peter 2 is one of Scripture's most concentrated statements of the church's identity as the covenant people of God constituted by union with Christ. The dense catena of Old Testament texts applied directly to the Christian community (vv. 6–10) demonstrates that God's purpose in forming a people for himself — announced at Sinai, sustained through the prophets, embodied in Israel — has reached its appointed center in the living cornerstone, Jesus Christ, and is now inhabited by all who are built upon him. The passage also provides one of the New Testament's clearest accounts of the atonement's purpose: Christ bore sin so that believers might die to sin and live to righteousness (v. 24) — the cross accomplishes both justification (sin borne) and the foundation for sanctification (new life in righteousness). The Shepherd/Overseer title in v. 25 ensures that the chapter closes not with demand but with pastoral assurance: the one who calls his people to a demanding pattern of ordered, suffering endurance is himself the guardian of their souls.

Reformed Theological Significance

Reformed Theological Significance: This chapter is a foundational text for the Reformed understanding of covenant continuity, the universal priesthood, and the inseparability of justification and sanctification. The unqualified transfer of Israel's covenantal identity language to the church (v. 9) is a direct expression of the Reformed understanding of one covenant people of God across both testaments, united not by ethnic lineage but by faith in the appointed cornerstone. The universal priesthood declared here does not dissolve the need for ordered ministry but establishes the missiological vocation of every believer — to offer spiritual sacrifices and declare God's excellencies — as the defining purpose of

the covenant community. The atonement statement in v. 24 grounds the chapter's ethics in gospel indicatives: the imperatives of submission, honorable conduct, and non-retaliation are not self-generated moral achievements but responses made possible by the one who bore sin and returned the straying to the Shepherd. This is the Reformed pattern in its clearest form: gospel actuality (Christ bore our sins) produces gospel ethics (we die to sin and live to righteousness), and the whole pattern is sustained not by human effort but by the ongoing oversight of the Shepherd and Overseer of souls.

Main Takeaway

You are not a displaced nobody trying to survive in a hostile world — you are chosen, royal, priestly, and God's own possession. That identity is the starting point, not the reward. Now live from it: crave the word that sustains it, order your life in a way that displays it, endure unjust suffering in the pattern of the one who secured it, and trust the Shepherd who will guard it until the end.

Preaching/Teaching Pitfalls

- **Preaching the identity declarations as aspirational goals rather than present realities.** The language of vv. 9–10 — “you *are* a chosen race, a royal priesthood” — is declarative, not hortatory. It announces what is already true, not what believers must achieve or become. Framing these declarations as targets to pursue rather than truths to inhabit inverts Peter's logic: the declarations ground the imperatives, they do not follow from them. A sermon that exhorts people to “become the royal priesthood” has missed the passage's governing grammar.
- **Reducing the universal priesthood to a statement about institutional church polity.** The priesthood of all believers is frequently enlisted in debates about church governance, the role of clergy, or the right of every believer to interpret Scripture for themselves. These are legitimate theological discussions, but they are not the point of this passage. Peter's universal priesthood is corporate, vocational, and missiological — the *telos* is “to declare the excellencies of him who called you.” Allowing polity debates to consume this passage starves it of its actual claim.
- **Misapplying the submission passages to situations of abuse.** This is the most pastorally dangerous pitfall in the chapter. Verses 18–20 address the specific situation of household servants who have no legal exit from their condition, calling them to dignified endurance and holding before them the pattern of Christ's own unjust suffering. This is not a universal mandate for victims of abuse, domestic violence, or exploitation to remain silent and compliant. Preaching these verses without this distinction — or without the broader biblical framework that limits unjust authority — can cause genuine harm. The passage dignifies those who

cannot escape their situation; it does not command those who can escape to remain.

- **Treating Christ's example in vv. 21–23 as the primary point of the atonement verses.** The exemplary dimension of Christ's suffering is real and textually present (v. 21: *hypogrammon*). But it is grounded in and preceded by the substitutionary dimension (v. 24). A sermon that focuses entirely on Christ as moral example — “look how Jesus handled unjust suffering; we should do the same” — without grounding the example in the prior reality of substitutionary atonement has inverted the passage's own logic. The example has power only because the Substitute has already done what no example can do.
- **Preaching the civic submission passage (vv. 13–17) as either absolute political quietism or as irrelevant to political engagement.** Peter's instruction to submit to human institutions is purposive (“for the Lord's sake,” v. 13) and instrumental (so that doing good silences foolish accusation, v. 15) — not an absolute, unconditional political theology. The Reformed tradition's recognition that human authority is legitimate but limited (Acts 5:29; Romans 13:1–7 read together) is essential context. Equally, the passage should not be dismissed as applicable only to first-century Roman conditions — the principle of ordered Christian engagement with civil life, marked by honor and good conduct, speaks directly to every generation's temptation to either baptize the state or abandon civic responsibility.
- **Losing the chapter's unity by preaching its three movements as separate sermons without carrying the governing thread.** The chapter's identity declarations (vv. 4–10) are the theological center that holds the whole together — the call to crave the word (vv. 1–3) flows from who they are, and the submission passages (vv. 13–25) are concretizations of how that identity lives in the world. A sermon series that treats each movement independently, without returning to the living stone / royal priesthood identity as the governing claim, will produce disconnected ethical instructions rather than a coherent vision of Christian life as dignified, Christ-patterned witness.