

## **Rhetorical Criticism for Expository Preaching: An Analysis of 1 Peter 2:4-10**

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Expository preaching requires critical biblical interpretation. As obvious as this statement may seem, one cannot overstate the importance of one's critical approach to the Bible in the preparation of expository sermons. Before there can be power in the pulpit, there are hours of research, hard thinking, and heavy exegetical lifting in the pastor's study. The critical approach one uses to explore the passage of Scripture is not an end in itself, but "should lead to a clearer understanding of the passage as a whole."<sup>1</sup>

Rhetorical criticism can be a useful tool for exegeting New Testament passages for expository preaching. As Harold T. Bryson notes, "A comprehensive understanding of the text requires studying word meanings and usages, literary characteristics, grammatical relationships, stylistic matters, and other exegetical pursuits."<sup>2</sup> I note in a previous publication that "it would not be wise to assert that there is only one valid hermeneutical approach to the New Testament."<sup>3</sup> As Greidanus argues,

if the biblical authors-in the New Testament as well as in the Old Testament and in 'prose' as well as in 'poetry'- did indeed use these structural patterns to mark their text in order to signal how they wished their work to be heard by their audience, contemporary expository preachers can also take

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<sup>1</sup> Robinson, Haddon W. *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), p. 66.

<sup>2</sup> Bryson, Harold T. *Expository Preaching: The Art of Preaching Through a Book of the Bible* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1995), 53.

<sup>3</sup> Mathews, S. H., *Christian Fasting: Biblical and Evangelical Perspectives* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2014), 4.

advantage of these ancient markings.<sup>4</sup> Greidanus asserts that rhetorical criticism “looks on the biblical text as a work of art and

therefore emphasizes the unity of form and content.”<sup>5</sup> Rhetorical criticism considers not only *what* the biblical authors say, but *how* they say it. Rhetorical criticism stands alongside other legitimate approaches to New Testament criticism. Elliot categorizes rhetorical criticism as a subdiscipline of historical criticism, alongside social-scientific, textual, and literary criticism.<sup>6</sup>

Robbins describes the task of rhetorical criticism thus:

“Within recent years, interpreters have plumbed Greco-Roman literature as well as biblical and Jewish literature in order to establish a comparative base for explicating NT documents... A major challenge for an interpreter of a NT document is to discern the particular manner in which patterns of thought and action characteristic both of Jewish and of Greco-Roman social, religious or literary traditions and conventions are exhibited in the document.”<sup>7</sup>

Rhetorical criticism is often combined with social-scientific criticism to become socio-rhetorical criticism, an approach which considers not only the rhetorical construction of the text but also the shared social and cultural norms of the original author and audience, which are often assumed and thus unspoken.

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<sup>4</sup> Greidanus, Sidney. *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 63.

<sup>5</sup> Greidanus, 58.

<sup>6</sup> Elliot, John H. *What is Social-Scientific Criticism?* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), p. 1.

<sup>7</sup> Robbins, Vernon K. *Jesus the Teacher: A Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation of Mark* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 1-2.

This article will take a rhetorical-critical approach to the interpretation of I Peter 2:4-10, and will discuss theological ramifications and practical applications of this text to expository preaching. The method will follow the process prescribed by McGonigal,<sup>8</sup> who modified Kennedy's five-step analytical process of classical Greek rhetorical analysis into a four-step process for analysis of New Testament texts.<sup>9</sup> These steps are: 1.) determine the rhetorical unit; 2.) determine the rhetorical situation; 3.) analyze arrangement and style; and 4.) evaluate rhetorical effectiveness. Each step will be explained and executed in turn. Thus, this article will model for the reader this rhetorical-critical approach to the interpretation of a New Testament text for the purpose of preparing expository sermons.

### **Rhetorical Analysis, Step One: Determine the Rhetorical Unit.**

The first step in rhetorical analysis is to determine the rhetorical unit. A rhetorical unit in Scripture is a self-contained unit. McGonigal notes that "a rhetorical unit may be a macro unit consisting of an entire book or a larger section within a book, or it may be micro unit consisting of a single thought unit within a book."<sup>10</sup> Thus a preacher may conduct a rhetorical analysis on a book of the Bible for the purpose of understanding the flow of the author's argument, then perform rhetorical analysis on individual thought units to gain a grasp of each passage's contribution to the author's argument, and the ways in which the author formulates his message. For practical

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<sup>8</sup> McGonigal, Kerry. *A Philosophy and Methodology for Preaching an Expository Book Series Governed by Apostolic Purpose and Based on Rhetorical Analysis: A Case Study of I Peter* D.Min. Diss, Bob Jones University Seminary, 2014, 34-44.

<sup>9</sup> Kennedy includes determining the species, the question, and the stasis of a text as a step in interpreting classical Greek rhetoric. Because the New Testament does not strictly conform to classical Greek textual forms, McGonigal omits this step in an effort to avoid imposing classical Greek forms on the text.

<sup>10</sup> McGonigal, 34.

purposes, it may be most useful to divide texts according to the transitional language the author includes. For example, the flow of Mark's gospel may be tracked through his use of the term "immediately", which frequently indicates a change of focus or location in the gospel. Likewise, in the epistle to the Romans, Paul uses diatribe to construct his argument, and poses rhetorical questions to direct his readers to a new line of thought (c.f., 9:20, 10:18). Many of Jesus' parables begin with a challenge or question, and end with a verdict from His audience, thus comprising a specific rhetorical unit. In Old Testament narrative, a story may have a specific beginning and end.

Because of the wide variety of literary genres represented in the Bible- indeed even within some books of the Bible- there is no hard and fast rule for determining the boundaries of a rhetorical unit. Rather, the rhetorical unit should arise from within the text. Thus, this first step of the rhetorical analytical process is not simply a preliminary step, but is integral to the process. Only through an analysis of the author's use of language to construct his argument can distinct rhetorical units be isolated for analysis. From the standpoint of practicality, expository preaching requires that longer rhetorical units be divided into shorter ones.

### **Rhetorical Analysis, Step Two: Determine the Rhetorical Situation**

The second step is to determine the rhetorical situation- "the circumstance that gave rise to the communication."<sup>11</sup> Who wrote the book? To whom? Why? When? Communication requires context, and a proper determination of the rhetorical situation which precipitated the writing of a biblical book can provide some aspects of this context. Relevant aspects of the rhetorical situation include the author, audience, date, and purpose. This information can yield further rhetorical

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<sup>11</sup> McGonigal, 36.

information, such as existing relationships between the author and the audience, the cultural context of the audience, recent events, and previous correspondence. Taken together, this information can help lead the interpreter to understand the “one overriding rhetorical problem”<sup>12</sup> which gave rise to the writing of the literature in question. This paper will demonstrate an analysis of these rhetorical factors in I Peter.

### *Author*

The authorship of both of Peter’s epistles is disputed. Evidence for Petrine authorship, as well as for a pseudonymous author can be marshalled. One author wrote “discussion of the authorship of 1 Peter is a futile discussion if its purpose is anything approaching absolute certainty.”<sup>13</sup>

Three arguments are generally raised against Peter as the author of 1 Peter. The first of these is the language and style of the book. In Acts 4:13, Peter is described as an “unschooled fisherman”, but the Greek style of 1 Peter is quite complex. One author summarized this argument as follows: “While one may surely presume some facility in Greek even among Palestinian fishermen in the first century who lacked formal education, the kind of Greek found in this epistle was probably beyond such a person, and hence the language was in all likelihood not given in its present form by Simon Peter.”<sup>14</sup> Another has written: “The skillful interweaving of these LXX texts is likewise difficult to reconcile with an unschooled, Aramaic-speaking fisherman, whose Bible would have been Hebrew and whose language of worship would have been Palestinian Aramaic.”<sup>15</sup> This seems

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<sup>12</sup> Kennedy, George. *New Testament Interpretation*. (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 35.

<sup>13</sup> Michaels, J. Ramsey. *1 Peter: Word Biblical Commentary 49*. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1988), lxii.

<sup>14</sup> Achtemeier, Paul J. *1 Peter: A Commentary on 1 Peter*. Hermeneia. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 4-5.

<sup>15</sup> Elliott, John H. *1 Peter: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 37B; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 120.

like a strong argument, however, 1 Peter would have been written at least 30 years after the events of Acts 4, so there is plenty of time for Peter to have developed his language skills through study and travel. Frederick Douglass was born a slave, but became a literary giant- could not Peter have done the same?

The second argument is that the letter does not contain quotations from Jesus, and other than a description of the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, does not reference stories from the life of Jesus. Some expect that Peter, as an eyewitness to the life of Christ, must necessarily record events from the gospels in his writing. While such an assumption is not necessarily true, evangelical authors have pointed out that 1 Peter, while not using the same language as the gospels, refers repeatedly to the early Jesus traditions from which the gospels arose.<sup>16</sup>

The third argument is that 1 Peter contains similarities with several other New Testament writings, particularly Romans and Ephesians. The assumption is that this similarity indicates that the author of 1 Peter borrowed from these other writings, and that for this to have happened, the epistle must have been written after the death of Peter. However, Peter was influential in the early church, and Peter and Paul drew from the same theological tradition, so parallels between these books are to be expected.

The early church saw the epistle as having been written by Peter, and other theories are relatively recent innovations. One of the most prominent scholars who denies Petrine authorship has admitted that “Lack of compelling reasons for such

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<sup>16</sup> Gundry, Robert H. “Verba Christi in I Peter: Their Implications Concerning the Authorship of I Peter and the Authenticity of the Gospel Tradition,” *New Testament Studies* 13 (1967): 336-350.

pseudonymous attribution would make the claim that 1 Peter is pseudonymous seem to be that much less likely.”<sup>17</sup>

Internal and external evidence points to Peter as the author of this epistle. 1:1 identifies Peter as the author, and evidence within the epistle bolsters this claim. The author is an elder and a witness of Christ’s sufferings (5:1) and provides a detailed description of the crucifixion (2:21-24). There are several points of correspondence with Peter’s speeches in Acts: God is no respecter of persons (Ac 10:34/I Pt. 1:17), Christ is the rejected cornerstone (Ac. 4:10-11/I Pt. 2:7-8), the “name” of Christ is an often-repeated theme (Ac. 3:6, 16; 4:1,12; 5:1/I Pt. 4:14, 16).

In addition to this internal evidence, tradition points to Peter as the author of the epistle. Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Clement of Alexandria all cited sections of 1 Peter as having been written by Peter.<sup>18</sup> Eusebius claimed that the epistle was authentic.<sup>19</sup>

#### *Date:*

References to suffering point to official persecution, which dates this book around the time of the persecution of Nero, around 64. Peter identified his place of authorship as Babylon (5:13). The Babylon of the Old Testament, in Mesopotamia, in modern-day Iraq, was a wasteland during this period. Babylon symbolizes greed, lust for power, and cruelty (it is also used this way in Revelation 17:5), and is probably a cryptic reference to Rome.<sup>20</sup> Peter probably wrote from Rome in the early 60’s.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Achtemeier, 41.

<sup>18</sup> Lea, Thomas D., *The New Testament: Its Background and Message* (Nashville, Broadman and Holman, 1996), 534.

<sup>19</sup> Eusebius, *Church History*, 3.3.4.

<sup>20</sup> Kistemaker, Simon J. *New Testament Commentary: James, Epistles of John, Peter, and Jude. Vol 2* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 19.

<sup>21</sup> Lea, 551.

*Audience:*

The audience is identified in 1:1. They lived in northern Asia Minor, above the Taurus mountains. 1:12 indicates that Peter probably had never been there or met his audience. His audience appears to be primarily Gentile, and had formerly worshipped idols (4:3). References to “ignorance” (1:14) and to being “not a people, but now the people of God” (2:9-10) are more appropriate for Gentiles than for Jews. This was a circular letter, but certain individuals were also intended as recipients (1:6-9). The church was probably suffering persecution. Suffering is addressed in every chapter of 1 Peter. In 4 out of 5 chapters, the ones suffering are the audience.<sup>22</sup>

*Purpose*

Several purposes for the epistle are possible, and it is unlikely that the author had a single, specific goal in mind (compare for example, Paul’s epistle to Philemon). However, a theme that emerges frequently and pervades the epistle is the theme of suffering or persecution. Peter refers directly to persecution in 1:6-7; 3:13-17; 4:12-19; 5:9. Rather than official persecution, the believers to whom Peter writes seem to be experiencing “local harassment generated by people who expressed hatred toward Christians.”<sup>23</sup> Peter summarizes his purpose in 5:12: “I have written to you briefly, exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it! ” Thus, Peter’s purpose is to encourage his readers to stand firm in God’s grace, even in the midst of suffering.

**Rhetorical Analysis, Step Three: Analyze Arrangement and Style**

The third step of the process is an analysis of the arrangement and style of the author’s argument. How does the author craft

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<sup>22</sup> Lea, 539.

<sup>23</sup> Kistemaker, 18.

the argument *rhetorically*? That is, how does the author use language to convey his intended meaning to his original audience? For the purposes of expository preaching, it is useful to grasp the author's argument on a larger scale (the macro-level), then narrow one's focus to evaluate the rhetoric of a particular passage to determine both how the author makes his argument, and how it fits into the larger flow of thought.

### *The Larger Rhetorical Unit: 1 Peter*

It makes sense to view 1 Peter as a unified whole. Its form is epistolary, and is not unusual in

the first-century world. Nevertheless some scholars have attempted to isolate fragments of creedal statements or hymnody within 1 Peter. Some scholars have interpreted 1 Peter as an early Christian catechism, a paschal liturgy, or a baptismal homily.<sup>24</sup> Some of these elements may be present, but as Blum notes, it is reasonable to take the view that "while Peter may have used material that existed in other forms..., yet these materials now form a letter the author intends to be intelligible apart from the knowledge of previously existing forms."<sup>25</sup>

Kistemaker divides 1 Peter into seven distinct rhetorical units, of which the present text comprises an entire division. These are: Introduction (1:1-2), Salvation (1:3-12), Holiness (1:13-2:3), Election (2:4-10), Submission (2:11-3:12), Suffering (3:13-4:19), and Conclusion (5:1-14).<sup>26</sup> This is a helpful outline to sketch out the main thrust of Peter's argument and determine the place of the present text within it.

Accepting the theme of 2:4-10 as election, we see a foreshadowing of this thought in the introduction, in which

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<sup>24</sup> Blum, Edwin A. in Gaebelien, Frank E., Ed., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Vol. 12* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 213-214.

<sup>25</sup> Blum, 214.

<sup>26</sup> Kistemaker, 24.

Peter greets the “elect” (1:1) have been “chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father” (1:2) for salvation through Christ and sanctification through the Holy Spirit. The idea is further developed through Peter’s description of the elect as “protected by the power of God” (1:5), and his assertion that the Old Testament prophets conducted their ministry for the sake of post-Pentecost Christians (1:12). Indeed, Jesus Christ Himself was “foreknown before the foundation of the world” but has appeared in the time of God’s choosing for the sake of believers (1:20-21).

First Peter 2:4-10 is examined in its own section below. However, it is significant to note that the argument developed in that section, which began to emerge in 1 Peter 1, is more fully developed in later pericopes. He says that Christians, while free, should see ourselves as “bond-servants of God” (2:16), a logical consequence of election, and the purpose for which the elect were called (2:21). Peter would later link the concepts of election and calling in 2 Peter 1:10. They appear here as part of a larger argument- we are called by God to salvation and holiness because we were chosen according to the foreknowledge of God. In 1 Peter 3:1-7, Peter gives guidance for the conduct of Christian marriage. He explains the reason for this in 3:9: the elect are “called for the very purpose that you would inherit a blessing” from godly living. The election of the church is not only to receive salvation, but to live sanctified lives and be blessed by God. Peter admonishes his audience to sobriety, love, and prayer so that God may receive glory and dominion forever (4:11). Peter concludes his discussion of calling and election with encouragement in suffering, arguing that God’s grace in suffering will “perfect, confirm, strengthen, and establish” the church which God has “called... to His eternal glory in Christ” (5:10).

*The Specific Rhetorical Unit: 1 Peter 2:4-10*

### Credibility

Peter establishes the credibility of his argument in this section primarily through the use of the Old Testament. He does this with three quotations and several allusions. He quotes Isaiah 28:16 to establish that Jesus Christ is the “precious Cornerstone” (2:6). He uses Psalm 118:22 to situate Jesus as the “Chief Cornerstone” which was rejected by men (2:7). Isaiah 8:14 is quoted in 2:8 to further develop the “stone” motif- Jesus is a *scandalon*, a stumblingstone which causes offense.

When discussing Christ, Peter quotes Old Testament passages, but when referring to the church, he finds it sufficient to allude to the Hebrew Scriptures. These include Exodus 19:6, Isaiah 43:20-21, and several references to Hosea (1:6, 1:9, 2:3, 2:25) in 1 Peter 2:9-10. Thus, the credibility of Peter’s argument is established through his use of prophetic Scriptures to indicate that Jesus Christ is the subject of Messianic prophecy, and that the elect have also been foreshadowed in Old Testament writings.

### Argument

Taken together, Peter’s use of Old Testament Scripture presents the following picture of Jesus Christ: He is the precious cornerstone who, in spite of His worth and value, was rejected by men. Those who are disobedient to Him will stumble over Him and take offense, but those who believe in Him will not be put to shame. As a consequence of Jesus’ ministry, the elect are “living stones” (in the tradition of Jesus as the Chief Cornerstone), being built into a spiritual house. Believers are both the spiritual house, and the living stones of which the house is built. This points to the unity of the body of Christ even amidst the diversity of its members. The elect are also a holy priesthood, serving God and offering spiritual sacrifices in the living house of God. Additionally, the elect are a “chosen people” and a “holy nation” for the purpose of proclaiming the excellencies of God (2:9). By His grace, the elect have received mercy (2:10).

## Emphasis

The emphasis in this passage is on Jesus Christ as the fulfillment of the “stone” prophecies, and the implications of this truth for the elect. Peter alludes to the Temple and the sacrificial system to demonstrate the redemptive work of Christ, who has fulfilled the Law and made the Temple and its sacrificial system obsolete. Because the Temple and its sacrifices have been fulfilled by Christ, the elect of God are now the living stones comprising a spiritual temple built on the Cornerstone. Rather than animal sacrifices, spiritual sacrifices are offered by the elect, the holy priesthood.

God’s election is evident throughout the text. First, Christ is “choice and precious” in the sight of God (2:4). This means that God has chosen to save the elect through the sacrifice of Christ, the “Lamb slain before the foundation of the world” (Revelation 13:8). Though Jesus has been rejected by the world, He is accepted by the Father, and is laid by God as the Chief Cornerstone. Likewise, God’s election of His church is a clear emphasis in the passage. The church is “a chosen people... God’s own possession” (2:9). Additionally, the election of the damned is found in this passage. Those who are disobedient to Christ will stumble over Him, “and to this they were also appointed” (2:8).

## Receptivity

Peter uses three rhetorical devices to promote the audience’s reception of his message. First, he refers to his audience personally. He uses the personal, plural pronoun “you” to refer to his audience in verses 5, 7, 9, and 10, as well as frequently throughout the entire epistle. In the current passage, Peter refers to his audience as “you” in four ways, each of which represents either a change in the believer’s status in Christ, or an injunction for the believer to obey, or both. The following table illustrates Peter’s use of the personal pronoun.

Text	Reader Status	Reader Injunction
2:5	Living stones, being built into a spiritual house, holy priesthood	Come to Him (implied, vs. 1), offer up spiritual sacrifices
2:7	Believers (implied: will not be put to shame, vs. 6)	none
2:9	Chosen people, royal priesthood, holy nation; called out of darkness into light	Proclaim the excellencies of God
2:10	The people of God who have received mercy	none

Second, Peter ensures reception of his message by frequently citing the Old Testament. Peter’s use of the Old Testament has been discussed above. In this section it is sufficient to say that by appealing to the authority of the Old Testament in quotations and allusions, Peter makes his message more likely to be received by his audience.

Third, Peter uses imagery and figurative speech to promote reception of his message. The figurative references in this passage are stones, buildings, priests, and nations. These references may point to Christ, the elect, or both, as the following table illustrates:

Text	Object	Image
2:4, 6	Christ	Living stone, Chief Cornerstone
2:5	Elect	Living stones, spiritual house, holy priesthood

2:8	Christ	Stumbling stone
2:9	Elect	Priesthood, nation

Thus, Peter employs rhetorical devices to involve his audience directly and apply his message to them personally, derives authority from the Old Testament, and uses figurative language to create metaphors which amplify and illustrate his message.

Objections

Peter does not seem to anticipate objections to his message, as he is writing to “the elect”; that is, to those who have already accepted the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Unlike Paul, who frequently uses diatribe to anticipate and respond to objections to his arguments (for example, in Romans), Peter writes as if to a friendly audience which desires instruction, rather than as to audience which requires persuasion.

Embellishment and Illustration

As noted above, Peter uses figurative language to illustrate his teaching. A chart above compared objects and images; perhaps it is more useful here to compare the Old Covenant and the New Covenant to understand Peter’s use of metaphorical and analogous speech:

Text	Old Covenant	New Covenant
2:5	Physical Temple built of stone	Spiritual house built of living stones
2:5	Animal sacrifices according to the Law of Moses	Spiritual sacrifices according to the grace of Christ
2:5, 9	Aaronic priesthood	Holy priesthood

2:9	Nation of Israel	Holy nation
2:10	Have not received mercy	Have received mercy

**Rhetorical Analysis, Step Four: Rhetorical Effectiveness**

As McGonigal notes, in evaluating the rhetorical effectiveness of Scripture, the interpreter is not in a position to pass judgment on the text, but rather to ask: “In what ways were the chosen strategies effective in securing the desired ends?”<sup>27</sup> To answer this question, one must ask what ends Peter intends in the writing of this epistle. That is, what is the intended rhetorical impact of his message to his original audience? He explains his purpose clearly in 5:12: “... I have written to you briefly, exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it!”. Thus, Peter’s “desired end”- his rhetorical purpose- is to encourage believers to stand firm in the true grace of God.

First Peter 2:4-10 serves Peter’s rhetorical purpose by presenting Christ as the solid foundation of a new and living, spiritual house, the church. Believers have a new identity in Christ which they did not have under the old covenant. The elect are chosen by God to be saved and sanctified, and to live holy lives. To that end, in this passage the elect are presented as living stones in the manner of the Chief Cornerstone (the expression “chip off the old block” comes to mind), as a spiritual house, as holy, royal priests, a chosen people, and a holy nation. Each of these images suggests permanence: stones, a house built with stone, a priestly line, a dyad (tribal or family identity), a nation. These are not transient concepts, but suggest stability. If Peter’s goal is to encourage his readers to stand on the true grace of God, then such a permanent self-identity would be a rhetorically effective image.

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<sup>27</sup> McGonigal, p. 43-44.

The second emphasis in Peter's rhetorical purpose is "the true grace of God." This passage effectively addresses this theme by presenting Christ as the Chief Cornerstone, chosen by God, and the object of Messianic prophecy. Those who believe in Him will not be put to shame, but those who disobey Him will stumble. He has called His people out of darkness and into light, made them into His people, and has shown them mercy. Believers are better prepared to stand on the true grace of God if they see Christ rightly, and see themselves in ways that point to perseverance.

### **Interpretive Difficulties**

The primary interpretive difficulty in the passage is found in 2:10, where Peter states that his audience "once were not a people, but now you are the people of God." If his audience was primarily Jewish, why would he refer to them as "not a people"? In fact, the Jews had long been a distinct people group united by a common heredity, heritage, culture, language and faith. If Peter is writing to Jews, why would he say that they were "not a people"? Furthermore, they had "not received mercy, but now you have received mercy". In what sense should Peter's Jewish Christian audience be understood to be "not a people" and to not have received mercy?

The solution lies in an understanding of Peter's allusion to Hosea. At God's injunction, Hosea married Gomer, a prostitute, to demonstrate the unfaithfulness of Israel. She bore him a daughter whom he named Lo-ruhamah, which means "no mercy" or "not loved",<sup>28</sup> as God explains in Hosea 1:6, "for I will no longer take pity on the house of Israel, that I would ever forgive them." Hosea's second son born to Gomer was named Lo-ammi, which means "not my people". God pronounced judgment on Israel in Hosea 1:9: "because you are not my people, and I am not your God." Peter's references to his readers as not having been a people, and not having received

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<sup>28</sup> Kistemaker, 93.

mercy before the redemptive work of Christ is quite consistent with their Jewish identity. Through the prophet Hosea God had declared Himself divorced from unfaithful Israel, and had renounced pity on them. This was not a permanent judgment, however, as He said in Hosea 1:10 “And in the place here it is said to them, ‘You are not My people,’ It will be said to them, ‘*You are* the sons of the living God.’” Peter’s exhortation to stand on the true grace of God should be understood as a reference to God’s fulfillment of Hosea’s prophecy in the redemptive work of Christ.

## **Conclusion**

A socio-rhetorical analysis of 1 Peter 2:4-10 for the purpose of expository preaching should yield a core exegetical idea from which expository sermon outlines may be constructed. Additionally, theological ramifications and practical applications should emerge. This section will explore these concepts, toward the goal of using socio-rhetorical criticism to interpret this passage for expository preaching.

### *Core Exegetical Idea*

The core exegetical idea of 1 Peter 2:4-11 is found in Peter’s description of Christ as the chosen Cornerstone. Because Christ is the Chief Cornerstone upon which the church is built, the elect are living stones- alive in Christ and participating in His salvation. He has fulfilled the law and the prophets, and has made the Old Covenant, with its sacrificial system, obsolete. Instead, the elect are now the temple (spiritual house), the living stones from which the house is built, the royal holy priests, the chosen nation, and the spiritual sacrifice. In other words, in Christ, believers participate in the full experience of salvation, internalizing through the Holy Spirit those things which were represented under the Old Covenant by external institutions.

### *Theological Ramifications*

Several theological ramifications arise here. It is beyond the scope of this paper to develop each of them fully, or even to present an exhaustive list. Rather, the purpose of this section is to demonstrate the kind of theological ramifications which may emerge from a rhetorical analysis of the text, and which may play a role in the preparation and delivery of an expository sermon.

Christians in the Protestant tradition have long espoused the doctrine of soul competency, often expressed as the “priesthood of the believer.” This is the idea that Christ is the only necessary or efficacious mediator between God and man. Rather than needing a priest to offer sacrifices, interpret Scripture, or lift up petitions, each believer comes to Christ personally. The elect are a kingdom of holy, royal priests who come to God through Christ and bring spiritual sacrifices.

The text also informs the doctrine of the church. The church consists of the elect, built together into a spiritual house of God. Often the distinction is made between the church as an organization and the church as an organism. While the elect have historically joined together and formed organizations for the purpose of advancing the Kingdom of God, these organizations are not the true church. The elect are the church, the living organism that is the body of Christ.

This text is not a primary text for the development of a doctrine of Israel, but it does provide relevant ancillary information. Peter describes the elect as the chosen people of God, as a royal, holy priesthood, and as a holy nation. Just as Paul argues in Romans 2:29 that true circumcision is of the heart and not of the flesh, so also Peter here portrays the elect as fulfilling many of the roles that Israel played under the Old Covenant. Those who see the church as the “new Israel” will find that this passage supports and amplifies this position.

### *Practical Applications*

The task of the preacher is to bring the truth of God's word to the world and to the church in a way that is clear, compelling, and motivating. The preacher's goal is for his audience to respond in faith and obedience to the Word of God. Thus, it is helpful to sketch out a few practical applications which may be developed from this text. This section is not intended to present an exhaustive discussion of applications that arise from the text, but gives the reader a sense of how such applications may be drawn.

Peter's frequent use of the pronoun "you" in this passage makes his teaching personal for his audience. The elect are living stones built into God's spiritual house. The elect are royal, holy priests. The elect are a holy nation. These are not simply theoretical concepts to affirm, but identities to embrace. The inherent plurality of these concepts points to the Christian community, called together in the local church. Just as a building cannot be made from one stone, or a nation from one person, so also the elect cannot fulfill these new identities in Christ in isolation from one another.

One might also point to the concept of shame in this passage. Verse 6 promises that the believer in Christ will not be put to shame for his or her faith. Shame is a universal human experience to which all members of an audience can relate. Faith in Christ saves the believer from the ultimate shame- the shame of bearing the penalty of one's sin. The elect can put their faith firmly and surely in Christ without fear of shame.

A final practical application might be found in verse 10. The basis of all the previous concepts- the elect's new identities in Christ as living stones, holy nation, royal, holy priesthood, chosen people- is found at the conclusion of the passage, where Peter points to the elect's having received mercy from God. This simple but profound truth can be powerfully applied in preaching. Those who put their faith in Christ have received mercy. God is not angry at the elect for their sins, nor does He expect great works of faith to earn righteous standing before

Him. He has simply shown mercy, and as a consequence of this mercy, has made His elect into living stones and holy priests, a chosen, holy nation transported from darkness to light.

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