

## 2:1-3—TASTE AND SEE

### The Text (NRSV)

*2:1 Rid yourselves, therefore, of all malice, and all guile, insincerity, envy, and all slander. 2:2 Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation—3:1 if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.*

### What's going on here?

-v.1—We begin with another “therefore,” and just as in 1:13, that word forces us back to the previous section. So the opening ethical command about “malice” and “envy” and “slander” (in other words, the *imperative* that we talked about last time) doesn’t come out of the blue. It follows from the declaration in 1:23 that we have already been “born anew” into a new identity and way of life (the *indicative*). So this is not just a generic statement about being “moral” people—it is uniquely grounded in the Christian story and Christian love. In fact, the call to “rid yourselves” of the vices in 2:1 is directly connected to the “genuine mutual love” that 1 Peter names in 1:22. In that verse, our author called Christians to have familial love—love that is to unite all believers as siblings since we all “invoke” the same God “as Father” (1:17).

For 1 Peter, what characterizes the love of the Christian community is its *genuineness*. We are called to love each other authentically—the Greek might be translated rather woodenly as “without hypocrisy” or “without pretense.” 2:1 says the same thing, but now puts it in the negative—if we are called *to* genuine love, then we are called *away from* deceit, artificiality, pretense, or hypocrisy (which is how we could translate the Greek word behind “insincerity” in 2:1).

Here 1 Peter gives us a form and framework for what Christian love is to be like. This is important for us to hear today, too, in a time and culture where “love” frequently refers to an intense (but often fleeting) emotional at-

traction, which may or may not be honest with the one who is loved. Love in this sense boils down to a *feeling*, and we are free to act lovingly based on whether we “feel like it” or not. But for 1 Peter, (and really we could say the same about Paul in that famous passage on love in 1 Cor. 13), love is not an option for the people of God. It is in our spiritual DNA, so to speak, because the God we call “Father” and who is the “Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1:17, 1:3) is characterized by love. For us, then, we are called to have a certain kind of love—one in which deception and hypocrisy are ruled out. Christian love, since it is none other than God’s love directed at each other, is always willing to be vulnerable enough to be honest and truthful. So that whole list of things we are supposed to “rid ourselves” of in 2:1 is really just another way of saying, “have genuine mutual love.” But maybe that point bears repeating.

-v.2-3—The image of longing for milk like nursing children may have in mind the kind of childlike dependence and trust that Jesus talks about in Mark 10:13-16 (and the parallel passages in Matthew and Luke). But probably there is also a sense of the single-minded tenacity an infant has for its mother’s milk, milk which *alone* is the newborn’s source of nourishment. 1 Peter commends that same single-minded, undivided longing to the Christian community, in contrast to the duplicitous, deceptive, and divided loves of the world. (In fact, the Greek word behind the translation “pure” in 2:2 is actually more like “unadulterated” or “without deception” and is the opposite of the word translated “guile” in 2:1.)

So what are believers to *long for*? What is this “pure, spiritual milk”? Most probably, our author intends that we yearn and “long for” the same “word” of good news that was first announced to us (see 1:25 and 1:12)—the gospel of Jesus Christ. It seems important for 1 Peter that believers continually immerse themselves in the new promise, identity, and

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### LOOKING FOR MORE?

*Other NT authors describe the love Christians are called to have for one another also. Here are a few other places to look:*

- **Romans 12:10-21**—This whole passage fleshes out how **genuine** (the same word as in 1 Peter 1:22) love is put into practice and includes “rejoicing with those who rejoice” and “weeping with those who weep.”
- **1 Corinthians 13:1-13**—We often associate this passage with marital love since it is read at weddings; however, Paul is not describing romantic love but the kind of love that is to mark all relationships for the Christian community.

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story that has claimed them now that they are a part of the new people of God. And so here they are commended to seek after that basic first *word* or message that was given to them about Jesus (in fact, the word translated “spiritual” in 2:2 is actually much more closely related to the Greek word for “word” than anything else).

2:3 is a paraphrase of Psalm 34:8, “O taste and see that the LORD is good; happy are those who take refuge in him.” Drawing further on the imagery of drinking mothers’ milk, our author describes the believing community as people who have in fact already tasted and found that “the Lord” is good. The word “if” here really works more like a “since;” it assumes that what follows is in

**CONNECTIONS—CHILDLIKE OR CHILDISH?**

- ❖ 1 Peter 2:2 wants believers to have a tenacious longing for “pure, spiritual milk” like infants have, and in Mark 10, Jesus says that we must “receive the kingdom of God like a little child.” But on the other hand, Paul reminds the church in Corinth that they should not remain spiritual infants but should grow to maturity (see 1 Cor. 3:1 and 13:11). In what ways is it *good* to be childlike in our faith, and in what ways might it perhaps be unhealthy to stay as children in the life of faith? In other words, what is the difference between being *childlike* in faith and being *childish* in faith?
- ❖ What are some ways in which we always remain like “children” in our relationship with God?
- ❖ Looking back on your own life of faith, what are some places where you have seen growth in yourself? What places feel like you still need to mature?
- ❖ Are there elements of your faith that have remained constant for you throughout your whole life? What things (maybe people, maybe stories, songs, or events) had made an impression on your faith early on that have stayed with you throughout your life? What things would you want to be sure are passed down to the next generation of believers?
- ❖ The “pure, spiritual milk” that 1 Peter talks about seems to be the same as the basic message of “good news that was announced to you” (1:25). How would you sum up what that basic message is? If someone who was new to the Christian faith asked you what it’s really all about, how might you respond? Would it include teachings of Jesus, certain stories, ethical commands, promises of life in heaven, etc? What makes certain things more “basic” to the faith than others?

**2:4-10—BUILT ON A ROCK**

<sup>4</sup>Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God’s sight, and <sup>5</sup>like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. <sup>6</sup>For it stands in scripture:

“See, I am laying in Zion a stone,  
cornerstone chosen and precious;  
and whoever believes in him will not be put to  
shame.”

<sup>10</sup>Once you were not a people,  
but now you are God’s people;  
once you had not received mercy,  
but now you have received mercy.

**QUOTE NOTE:**  
THIS COMES FROM ISAIAH 28:16.

**QUOTE NOTE:**  
THIS BORROWS HEAVILY FROM  
HOSEA 1:9 AND 2:23 ESPECIALLY.

<sup>7</sup>To you then who believe, he is precious; but for those who do not believe,

“The stone that the builders rejected  
has become the very head of the corner;”

**QUOTE NOTE:**  
THIS COMES FROM PSALM 118:22.

<sup>8</sup>and

“A stone that makes them stumble,  
and a rock that makes them fall.”

**QUOTE NOTE:**  
THIS COMES FROM ISAIAH 8:14.

They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.

<sup>9</sup>But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

**QUOTE NOTE:** SEVERAL TITLES IN  
THIS VERSE COME FROM GOD’S  
SPEECH TO ISRAEL IN THE WILDER-  
NESS IN EXODUS 19:6. SEE ALSO  
ISAIAH 43:20-21.

2:4-10, CONTINUED**What's going on here?**

-v.4-5—As always, 1 Peter is playing with a rich variety of images from the Hebrew Scriptures. We jump from infants drinking their mothers' milk, which paints a rather warm and maternal picture of the God who has given them "new birth" (1:3) to a very different picture of a stone that is used for building. It is hard to know for sure what leads our author to make this abrupt jump in imagery, although some scholars see in the back of our author's mind an allusion to the story in Exodus 17 where Moses strikes the rock at Massah and Meribah to bring forth water for the people of Israel to drink. (Supporting this possibility is the fact that Paul also uses that story in 1 Cor. 10:1-5, where he emphasizes the people of God drinking "the same spiritual drink" from the rock, which he then identifies with Christ. On the other hand, 1 Peter gives us no sure signs that this story is in mind.)

At any rate, it is clear that the "living stone" to which believers are to come is Christ, and by being connected to him, Christians themselves become "living stones." This play with the imagery of stones develops an important idea for 1 Peter—what was true for Christ will be true for Christ's followers. So here, if Christ is metaphorically a stone, then those who follow him will be like stones as well in some way. When we get to the end of this chapter, 1 Peter will move beyond metaphors and use the same kind of reasoning for how Christians should live; specifically, 2:20ff will say that if Christ suffered and was rejected by people, then Christians can expect the same kind of rejection and suffering. Clearly 1 Peter has a sense that Jesus' suffering is somehow unique and definitive, and yet the text assumes that following Jesus' example in that way is part of what it is to 'be holy as God is holy.' Here in 2:4-5, the groundwork is laid for that move, though, by describing Christ and Christians alike as "living stones."

Also important for 1 Peter here is the communal sense of being "living stones," for in that image, the stones are built together into a house. There is always a sense that believers necessarily belong to a *community* for 1 Peter—there are no "Lone Ranger Christians," in other words. Paul uses similar imagery of the church being built into a building on the foundation of Jesus Christ in 1 Corinthians 3:10-16, even going as far as to say that Christians are built into God's *temple* where the Spirit dwells. Ephesians 3:21-22 also goes in this direction. In all of those previous texts, the building imagery is meant to emphasize the unity of Christians who were tempted to split along different lines (Jew/Gentile, sects taught or founded by different teachers within Christianity, etc.). It is not clear whether there were issues of unity in 1 Peter's mind, again remembering that this letter was sent to so many different Christian

communities in several very large geographic regions. But Peter may want to emphasize *belonging* for his readers, specifically that they belong to Christ, even when they feel marginalized by the world. This theme is about to be developed by references to the Hebrew Scriptures in vv.6-8, but even here the idea is clear: Christ was rejected by others and was nevertheless "chosen and precious" in the sight of God. And since Christians are joined to Christ, they too can count on both rejection from the world and acceptance by God. For Christians already beginning to feel that increasing tension and sense of being unwelcome in their surroundings, the promise being chosen and precious by God was an important reminder.

-v.6-8—Given how much the Hebrew Scriptures seem to influence and shape 1 Peter, it's no surprise that we now get a flurry of quotations from the Old Testament while this stone imagery is being developed. These references are not given to *prove* a point or support an argument so much as to flesh out the imagery and develop the ideas already present in 2:4-5. It is interesting to note that the quotation in 2:7, which comes from Psalm 118, recurs throughout the New Testament as it reflects on the life of Jesus (see also Matt. 21:42, Mark 12:10, and Acts 4:11). The image of Christ as the stone rejected by "the builders" and yet chosen by God to be the "cornerstone" helped the early church to interpret who Jesus was and how it was that the Messiah of God could end up on a cross.

At the end of these quotations, the language in 2:8 about those who stumble on this stone being "destined" to do so probably rubs us the wrong way as we read it, and probably both because we don't like language that inhibits our human freedom, and because we especially don't like language that suggests that God forces people to reject him (the language of God hardening Pharaoh's heart in Exodus is another tough one along these lines). But for 1 Peter, what is most important is the idea that the rejection, suffering, and death of Jesus were not accidental, but part of God's ancient design to redeem a fallen world. We heard the same language in 1:20 about Christ being "destined" to suffer, and here the point is the same. The emphasis is on God's purpose and intention in Christ's rejection, rather than on the badness of the ones who rejected him. This sense of God's great plan of salvation was again intended to be a source of comfort for people beginning to wonder whether the rejection they were experiencing meant that God was no longer in control.

-v.9-10—There is a lot packed into these verses, and again 1 Peter is drawing from the Hebrew Scriptures as the text describes the Christian community. The titles "chosen race," "royal priesthood," and "holy nation"

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all are inspired by God's speech to the newly formed people of Israel in Exodus 19. God recites the history of their salvation, how they have been brought out of Egypt and how YHWH bore them up "on eagles' wings" and has now made them into a people. These titles gave ancient Israel an identity—whereas previously they had been a disorganized collection of slaves, they were now a united people. For 1 Peter, the parallels to Christians who have come into the church from various backgrounds and previous "lives" is obvious. So our text has no qualms about appropriating that same language, once describing national Israel, to the new people of God in Christ Jesus. Again, the point of this language is in part to give a sense of comfort and belonging to people who are now feeling at odds with the society around them. Regardless of how they be-

come ostracized by their neighbors for living a new way and serving a new lord (who is not Caesar), our author insists that they will always belong to God. And in fact, God has not "settled" for them, but has chosen them and declared them to be precious and beloved. This language also highlights the contrast between believers' old ways of life and the new identity they have in Christ. Belonging to God's people will mean breaking with the prevailing ways of the world in some respects, and 1 Peter will not flinch from pointing that out. But it bears repeating that for our author, the disconnect with the world does not mean a retreat from it, but rather simply a willingness to suffer and to be rejected in the midst of the world while the Christian community practices a genuine love, God's own love, that the world may not understand.

**NOTES**