

1 Peter 2:1-12

1 Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, insincerity, envy, and all slander.¹ 2 Like newborn infants, long for pure spiritual milk so that through it you may grow into salvation,² 3 for you have tasted that the Lord is good.³

¹ Prior to the beginning of chapter 2, Peter speaks of the Christian life in terms of the full impact of the gospel and the new life we celebrate. Peter proclaims that Christians are to be holy: “be holy in all your conduct; for it is written ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy (1 Peter 1:15-16).’” This reference to holiness is not a quality inherent to believers. No one is born holy. Nor is this a special sect of Christian who is canonized by the church. Rather, Peter’s understanding of holiness is similar to Paul’s: because the Lord our God is holy, we are called holy. It is God who makes us holy as we are joined in union with Christ. Holiness means we are consecrated, set aside for God’s mission and ministry in the world. Moreover, being made holy by God in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit, we are called to align our lives with the life God is calling us to. That means we are concerned about our conduct and with obedience. Thus Peter exhorts at the beginning of chapter 2 that because of the gospel, because of God’s revelation in, through, and as Jesus Christ we are called to a different way of life. Hatred, cruelty, lying, trickery, envy, insincerity, and slander are all things we are called to turn away from. Through and through, because of the dynamic and living power of the gospel, we are called to live our lives very different from the ways and wiles of sin. Being in Christ, having new life in Christ means we aren’t about the business of actions that tear down; rather we are called to patterns of living that seek to unify the body of Christ and bear witness to our baptismal identities.

² Peter lifts up this reference to newborn infants to remind believers of their new life in Christ. The use of spiritual milk is not in contrast to Paul’s use of milk in 1 Corinthians 3. Rather, Peter is using a different metaphor altogether for the Christian life. Whereas Paul uses milk to press the issue that the Corinthians are acting like children in the faith rather than adults, Peter is speaking about a spiritual reality by talking about spiritual milk. This spiritual milk is a gift of grace. “Just as the promised land flowed with milk and honey for the children of Israel, so also Christian believers receive milk as a foretaste of the fuller salvation yet to come (David L. Bartlett, “The First Letter of Peter” *The New Interpreters Bible* vol. 12 (Abingdon: Nashville, 1998), 264).” Peter speaks of believers growing into salvation.

We don’t understand everything about the Christian life right away. It takes time and growth. Even after a number of years it still takes time. Anyone who thinks that they have arrived is not only fooling themselves, they aren’t allowing God to do what God does. While we declare that we are saved here and now, being saved is something we also continue to grow into; reaching full fruition when we are raised in glory with Christ Jesus our Lord.

³ This spiritual milk is not just a gift in the form of something we ingest; it is a metaphor that refers to the reality that Christ dwells in us and us in Christ. As we grow more and more into our lives in Christ, growing more into salvation, we really do taste and see that the Lord is good. This verse may also be speaking about the celebration of communion. Baptism celebrates the new life we have in Christ while communion celebrates our nurture and nourishment of that new life. If nothing else these verses are sacramental in tone.

4 Come to him, a living stone⁴, rejected by human beings yet chosen and precious in God's sight, 5 and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house⁵ to be a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.⁶ 6 For it says in scripture: "See, I am laying a stone in Zion, a cornerstone, chosen and precious, and whoever believes in it shall not be put to shame."⁷ 7 To you then who believe, this stone is precious; but for those without faith, "the stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone."⁸ 8 and "A stone that makes them stumble, and a rock that makes them fall."⁹ They stumble by

⁴ "The familiar metaphor of 'living stone' opens upon a whole range of connected images – temple, priesthood, sacrifice, holiness, and a spiritual house. As commentators have long noted, this phrase has a quite common and literal meaning. A stone is 'living' if it is uncut and still in its natural place. Thus an uncut stone is the worst of all possible stones to serve as a cornerstone. The whole point of a cornerstone is to have a 'perfect' reference for the rest of the building. A cornerstone needs to be accurately cut and accurately laid. A 'living stone' is neither. Of course in 1 Peter this stone is 'living' also because it has a unique connection to life. This stone is not simply uncut; it is alive. Jesus himself is alive and is the source of life for us (Lewis R. Donelson, "1 Peter 2:2-10" *The Lectionary Commentary: The Second Readings: Acts and the Epistles* (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 2001), 552)."

⁵ Because Jesus is the living stone we are called to be like living stones through our union with him. We are called to be participants in the life and ministry of Jesus. As such we are called to be a "spiritual house;" our lives are to be viewed in terms of Jesus' life and we, as the body of Christ, are called to be a temple of the Lord.

⁶ At this point Peter shifts his metaphor to indicate that we aren't just called to be a spiritual house because we are joined to Jesus, we are also joined to his priesthood. In calling Christians a holy priesthood, Peter indicates that there is something particular about all Christians. There is something different about the way Christians are called to live and act in the world. It reminds us that our primary "duty" is to worship and serve the Lord our God who has given himself to be known by us in, through, and as Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. As a holy priesthood, we are called to offer spiritual sacrifices. Gone are the days of ritual animal and grain offerings, what we offer are our lives to the Lord. We give of ourselves and dedicate our lives wholly to God. In calling us a holy priesthood, Peter reminds us that we are consecrated by the Lord and in response to his great love for us we serve God alone.

⁷ Quoting from Isaiah 28:16, Peter highlights the role of Jesus in terms of the Christian life. He is one upon whom we can build and rest our lives. Though rejection and apparent disgrace might come from basing our lives upon this stone, we will not be put to shame. Moreover, as is often pointed out, in referring to Jesus as the cornerstone or keystone, we become aware that it is his life and ministry that holds the whole of our lives together. "That Christ is chosen reminds the readers that the whole pattern of salvation is part of God's electing plan from the beginning—centering in Christ but including all believers. That Christ is precious reminds the readers of the pervasive distinction between valuable and tawdry goods, the things of heaven and the things of this world (Bartlett, 266)."

⁸ Reference to Psalm 118:22

⁹ Isaiah 8:14 For those who believe, who have been given the gift of "sight" by the Holy Spirit, recognition of Jesus' singular importance is apparent. But for those who don't believe or reject belief altogether, then they are

disobeying the word, as they were destined. 9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of his own, so that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.¹⁰ 10 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.¹¹ 11 Beloved, I urge you as aliens and exiles¹² to abstain from the desires of the flesh that wage war against your life. 12 Conduct yourselves

the ones who cast aside the living stone, unable to perceive that it is the living stone that is truly the cornerstone of the whole structure. And so the living stone becomes a stone of stumbling when it is rejected.

¹⁰ This is one of the most famous passages found in 1 Peter and serves as a paradigm for the Christian life. No one who is baptized into the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit is exempt from this designation. Contrary to what the world might think about us as well as what we often assume about ourselves, Peter emphasizes that we really do have a purpose in the world. Through our union with Christ we are elevated to this role of God's own making. Yet this is not to lead us to be arrogant or overconfident; rather it is a blessing that leads to a major responsibility.

What does it mean to be chosen, royal, holy, and God's own? Using language that was once used for Israel, Peter now uses it to refer to the church. We are a chosen race because God has called us to himself in Christ. Joined to Christ Jesus we are God's own; chosen for his work in the world. As a royal priesthood we are called to participate in Jesus' priesthood; to be about the things that he is already doing out of the freedom of his love in the power of the Holy Spirit. As a holy nation we are called to a way of life that is distinctive from the rest of the world. We are truly God's people in the world and that comes with a profound and dignifying responsibility. Yet it is a responsibility that is both joyful and enriching: we are called to proclaim the mighty acts of God. We are called to bear witness to the grace-filled reality that out of the freedom of his love God penetrated into the depths of our darkness and sin-separation in, through, and as the man Jesus to deal with us from within that situation, taking on what is ours to give to us what is his. We are called to bear witness to this love, grace, peace, and salvation that comes 100% from the side of God as free gift and invitation. Some might protest that they aren't good enough or worthy enough to participate in this proclamation. But that is to miss the point.

By virtue of our baptisms the Lord our God "sanctifies us, who are by nature polluted; he chose us, when he could find nothing in us but filth and vileness; he makes his peculiar possession from worthless dregs; he confers the honor of priesthood on the profane; he brings the vassals of Satan, sin, and of death to the enjoyment of royal liberty (John Calvin, *The First Epistle of Peter*, 75)." It is precisely because God calls us, sanctifying us through our union with Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit, that we are able to do any task. For we know that the burden to bring it to completion does not rest on our shoulders but on those of the Father's precious Son who died for us and was raised for us. We participate in his ministry of proclamation and through that participation find the confident humility we need to bear witness to the mighty acts of God; to bear witness to the salvation and life that are his to give out of the freedom of his love.

¹¹ Hosea 1:0 and 2: 23.

¹² This phrase serves as a reminder that while we are in the world, while we surely live and dwell as those who are caught up in the ways of the world, we are resident aliens.

honorably among the Gentiles,¹³ so that, though they malign you as evildoers, they may see your honorable deeds and glorify God when he comes to judge.¹⁴

¹³ Gentiles or better yet nations.

¹⁴ We bear witness through our words but also through our lives!