

# Therefore

1 Peter 2:1-3

1 Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, 2 as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, 3 if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious.  
(1 Peter 2:1-3 (NKJV))

Too often as we read these scriptures, we quickly move from word to word without allowing the full impact of what they mean to seep into our minds. And when we do that, we unknowingly forfeit the benefits of having grasped their full meanings.

Here, chapter two begins with the word, “therefore”. And it really is appropriate to do as so many preachers and teachers instruct, and that is when we see the word “therefore” we should go back and see what that word is “there for”. And it almost always refers back to something especially important that has just been given in the preceding words.

And here, the word “therefore” is referring us back to some of the blessed truths that we have been diligently studying in chapter 1. And while yes, we have already spent several week studying through those words, if we are to fully grasp the “why” and the “how” of these next words of chapter 2 about laying

1 aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, 2 as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, (1 Peter 2:1-3 (NKJV))

then we really do need to go back and refresh our minds about some of those things.

And may I also remind us again, that saying and resaying the truths of scripture is exactly what we should continually do, over and over again. Why do I say that? It is because that is exactly what God teaches us to do all throughout these scriptures, to write and to re-write His words upon the pages of our hearts so that when we find ourselves in need of them, we will have them readily available in our minds. My best reminder is in the Book of Acts where Stephen, one of the leaders of the New Testament church, as he was about to be stoned for his faith in Christ, he took one last opportunity to again rehearse back to the Jewish leaders how God had saved them out of bondage in Egypt and had brought them into a new life in the Promised Land.

Like Stephen, we too, should never miss an opportunity to rehearse back to the people we encounter all the goodness and grace that God has shown to us in saving our souls from our bondage to sin.

Here in today's passage, God is reminding these dear saints of some sinful behaviors that are rearing their ugly heads in their conduct, malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy and evil speaking, and He is telling them why they should turn away from those behaviors. It is because they have been especially "chosen" by God to be saved and to lead Godly lives as they go about their days among their brethren. Those words beginning in chapter 1, verse 1,

1 . . . chosen 2 according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood. (1 Peter 1:1-2 (NASB))

Simply put, God is saying to these saints, "because you have been 'chosen' by God to have and to live an eternal life of righteousness in Christ, you must 'therefore' lay aside the ways of unrighteousness".

1 all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, (and) 2 as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word. (1 Peter 2:1-3 (NKJV))

And so often as I read these words in the scripture that tell about God "choosing" people to be saved, it prompts me to reconsider the question that seems invariably to arise among our brethren, and that is, "If these people have been chosen to receive eternal life, does that mean that others have not being chosen? And does that also mean that God had a reason for choosing those particular people, as and when He did, but not to choose others in the same way? And if so, why does He do things that way?"

As we said when we studied these words on other occasions, this concept of being "chosen" truly is often confusing to the minds of the average Christian, even an anathema to some, especially to some of our brethren in the Arminian denominations. They struggle with accepting the concept that they are now saved simply because God and God alone "chose" to save them and not simply and wholly as a result of their own doing. But folks, I must confess to you that I see no other way to read and to understand these words.

1 . . . chosen 2 according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood. (1 Peter 1:1-2 (NASB))

Just to refresh our minds, this concept given here of being “chosen” has several aspects that are often strongly debated, such as “does it mean that God chooses everyone to be saved, but it is only the few who respond and receive Him as Savior and Lord who actually become saved?” To my understanding, that is what many of our Arminian brethren hold to, and perhaps they are correct. But such logic does not seem to really fit the definition of choosing. But be all that as it may, if you are a believer, then in some manner or another, according to these words, you have been “chosen”.

But regrettably, at the same time, others, those that make their “free will” choices to refuse Christ and to walk their own path, to enter by the “broad gate” and walk that “broad path” that leads to destruction, they are not “chosen” to be saved. And that is when behaviors such as these, “malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander” (1 Peter 2:1 (NASB) are commonplace, even rampant in their daily lives.

But also unfortunately, it is not just the “unbelievers” that behave that way. Before we, you and I were saved, we also walked in those very same ways. And “remnants” of those behaviors are still present within us even after we are saved. And the exhortation here is for us to be very intentional about those remnants, that we are to “shake off”, “lay aside” those old sinful behaviors. We have been changed by the cleansing blood of Jesus and those behaviors are no longer a part of who we are and we must not allow them to be.

I am reminded of how God exhorted the Israelites to drive out the people and their pagan religions from the Promised Land, because if they were allowed to continue to live there among them, they would eventually influence the Israelites to join with them in their beliefs and behaviors. And unfortunately, they did not heed God’s warnings and that exact thing took place.

And that is what God was commanding these dear saints to do with their old friendly habits of malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy and evil speaking, to drive them out of their souls.

And in verse 16 of chapter 1, they, and we, are further exhorted to carry those changes that have taken place within their souls all the way to the point of our “being holy”, just as God Himself is “holy”. Listen!

14 As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, (the malice, the deceit, the hypocrisy, the envy and the

evil speaking) 15 but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, 16 since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy."  
(1 Peter 1:14-16 (ESV))

You might have noticed in verse 13 that there was another "therefore". And all of these "therefores" have to do with "why" we must lay aside all of these wicked ways and instead turn our hearts to Christ and to His "narrow path" of righteousness and holiness. And the "why" is clearly given to us here. It is because God Himself is Holy, "therefore", we ought always to respond and say "yay, we want to be like Him. We want to . . ."

1 Therefore, put aside all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, 2 like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation.(1 Peter 2:1-2 (NASB))

Folks, consider these words about "putting aside all malice and deceit and hypocrisy and envy and evil speaking". This is an instruction being given to mostly mature believers in Christ, men and women who are saved and are going to heaven; but yet are still needing to be reminded about turning away from their old ways. I exhort you and me to consider that these words are also intended for you and me.

And also note that there is a special "inference" being provided to us here in verse 2,

2 as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, (1 Peter 2:2 (NKJV))

The inference given in the words "newborn babes" is not to imply that they are only intended for brand new believers, but rather to say that, "just as" a new-born baby has an in-born hunger to seek for and find pure milk, so also should all believers, those believers then and you and me now, should have an on-going hunger and thirst after the "pure milk" of God's word; that just as a mother's milk is the exact nutrition that a baby needs, so also is the "pure milk" of God's word the exact nourishment that we need for us to grow and prosper in God's righteousness.

But there is also another inferences being given within these words, the inference that perhaps some of these believers were not as mature in God's word as they should be. It has again to do with the use of the words "pure milk" and the fact that "milk" is most often given to "babies" and not often given to mature adults.

Had they been really mature, this letter might have instead been exhorting them to chew on the “solid food” of God’s word. My thoughts go to a similar exhortation given in the Book of Hebrews. Listen!

12 For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, 13 for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. 14 But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil. (Hebrews 5:12-14 (ESV))

Again, the “pure milk” of God’s word is excellent in every way. But there is also a time for Christians to move on to more mature “solid food” so that they will know how to deal with more serious issues, serious issues such these, malice, deceit, envy, hypocrisy and evil speaking.

Consider these words for a moment! Malice is defined in the bible commentaries as “anger settled into and overgrown within the bosom of fools, retained till it inflames a man or woman to delight in harming others”.

And guile, or deceit is the use of flattery, falsehood, and delusion, which is a crafty imposing upon another’s ignorance or weakness, to hurt and do damage to him or her and to their reputation.

And hypocrisy, here is in the plural, implying that there are all sorts of hypocrisies; in matters of religion, counterfeit piety; in conversation counterfeit friendship, paying compliments, making promises that will never be kept, pretending friendships.

And “all envies” which is everything that can be called envy, grieving at the good and welfare of another, at their abilities, their prosperity and their success.

And in “evil speaking”, to slander another person, defaming him or her, backbiting against them.

All of these sinful and immature behaviors are contrary to what Jesus describes in John 13 as being the way disciples should treat one another.

34 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. 35 By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”  
(John 13:34-35 (ESV))

This is what God expects from His dear sons and daughters, that they (that we) are to “love” one another with pureness of heart,

1 . . . laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, 2 as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby. (1 Peter 2:1-2 (NKJV))

Yes, these words were written to this special group of Christian believers, but they were recorded in this bible for you and me so that we could learn from them, because

16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16-17 (ESV))

As I first began to study through this passage and to ask God for His words to give to you, my first thoughts went to such examples as the national news programs, and then to some of my neighbors. And I could recall all of these behaviors being commonplace, “malice and deceit and hypocrisy and envy and slander”. But then, as I continued to work through these scriptures, my mind went also to some very recent conversations in which I myself was caught up in some of these very behaviors. And I marveled at how easy it was for me to drift into it. We got caught up in telling stories and relating incidents to each other. And in those stories, I found it easy to embellish some of the things that I did, while diminishing, even criticizing and belittling, the things done by others; and I especially found that I was giving “bad reports” about other people, all to the point that my personal behavior looked a lot like these words . . . malice, deceit, envy, hypocrisy and evil speaking.

So then, while I, as your pastor need to be “chewing on solid food”, I find that I need to put down my knife and fork and pick back up the “pure milk” of God’s word; and to let His “pure milk” lead me to repentance for my immature and sinful behavior.

And as I have re-read these words several times, I do now know why God added these last few words at the end,

3 if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious. (1 Peter 2:3 (NKJV))

In my first reading of this verse 3, I first thought that God was separating out some of the unsaved from the saved. And perhaps He is. But more than that,

for those of us who are fully confident of our salvation, God is saying very strongly, “if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious” then you are without excuse. You, Bill, need to get on with your Christian walk and stop behaving as if you need to go back to being “bottle-fed” with the “pure milk” of God’s word. I need to repent, pick up my “solid food” and get about my “Father’s business”.

So then, before we close, may I admonish each of you, that “If you indeed have tasted that the Lord is gracious”, and if are you fully confident that you personally are eternally saved, then you, like me, need to move ahead and get really serious about your behavior. The next time you hear or sense malice or deceit or hypocrisy or envy or evil speaking welling up within you, swallow it back down. Get alone with the Lord and ask Him to reveal to you the source of those sinful behaviors and for Him to give you the “pure milk” of His word to wash it away from your heart.

1 Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, 2 as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, 3 if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious.  
(1 Peter 2:1-3 (NKJV))