

“Tasting God’s Grace”

1 Peter 2:1-12

by **Pastor Tim Dodson**
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1 Peter 2:1-12 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. 4 Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, 5 you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. 6 Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture, "Behold, I lay in Zion A chief cornerstone, elect, precious, And he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame." 7 Therefore, to you who believe, He is precious; but to those who are disobedient, "The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone," 8 and "A stone of stumbling And a rock of offense." They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed. 9 But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; 10 who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy. 11 Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, 12 having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.

In verse 23 of the last chapter, Peter spoke of "having been born again, and that, by an incorruptible seed" ...and begins here in chapter 2 with "therefore..." The idea therein is "now that I have been born again, then..." and he moves on to where we ultimately want to go in this study, and that is into the actual application of truth which leads to maturity and Christlikeness. This is a matter of moving beyond our salvation into the plan that God has for each us. Peter says "therefore," or "because we have been born again," we are to "get rid of all evil behavior." We are to "be done with all deceit, hypocrisy, jealousy, and all unkind speech." Hmmm! If only we were to find such evidenced in even a substantial percentage of the greater church!

Scripture is clear that all righteousness and holy living is only possible once we have been truly reborn. So obviously everything must begin there. "Step one" has to precede anything we might relationally bring to the table. For the "living out" of Christ is only possible through the control of the Holy Spirit in one's life, and the Spirit of God is only available to redeemed believers. Yet we also would in turn have to cut out vast segments of scripture if we attempted to rule out our eventual and critical personal participation in all of this. Call it what you want...discipline, effort, work...all the words which can tend to universally cause us to bristle, yet we clearly and repeatedly find them all in scripture.

There are those that conveniently lay the whole responsibility of our faithful living at the feet of Christ, chanting the mantra of the modern "Jesus-lite" church: "it's all Jesus! He does it all!" Yes, Jesus does all the *redemptive* work and we cannot add to it. But let's not forget that this Christianity thing is designed to be a *relationship*. It is something we live out *with Christ*. We are to have an active and personal participation in all of it! And we...*if we have really been born again*, are transformed and impassioned toward our new Redeemer and Lord. For a relationship is a two way flow of love and relational effort. What we do we do because we are now *compelled*. If we are not so motivated, it is because we are not in love! Salvation and the cross of Christ is not an airbag...designed to catch us in times of crisis. One need only walk with Christ for a short time to realize that sometimes He is simply *not* going to catch you and there is probably going to be some blood! Again, this thing is a *relationship*. A bond. A friendship. A marriage. A covenant agreement. A relational union between us and God.

Certainly we must be very careful in this, as we know that we can, at least for a time and in the power of our own strength, evoke some level of personal 'behavior modification.' We can, through our own strength alone, carry on in moral fortitude, in a "faux-faith." We can do it pretty convincingly too, and we can do it for a surprisingly long time! In fact, much longer than anyone would naturally think! But absent of that relationship with God there will come that eventual failure on some level, if only in the obvious lack of peace, growth, and/or real 'fruit' of spiritual authentication. What Jesus brought us is much more than just an adjustment in manners and a location change for our Sunday mornings. Salvation is rather a complete *new person, a new nature, a new beginning, ...a new birth.*

Upon that rebirth, we essentially "begin again." We are babies once more, with all of the cuteness and all of the smelly diapers. *We learn* and *we grow* in much of our new Christian life, just as a child must learn to feed himself, walk without falling, ride a bike, tie his shoes and spell his name. The ability is out there, as well as the tools and structural assistance around us, but at some point that child must actually and personally *try*. He has to move. He has to act. Or mommy and daddy will be feeding him in a high chair, and tying his shoes for him his whole life.

As we read in chapter 1, we know that these believers had been enduring a great deal of trials and suffering from "enemies" that were tangible and *out there*, but Peter begins now to instruct them on dealing with the intangible enemies that were *inside*. Those are the enemies that are so often ignored or postponed in times of trial and heightened persecution. Despite all these people were under, He was still calling upon these believers to reject sin...to feed on God's Word, and to understand, accept, and take their place in God's greater plan for His church and His kingdom.

Peter was telling them to not look "out there" at the affront of the enemy but to look inside...to turn their attention to what was IN them. Because those other battles, as well as the enemy himself, was out of their personal control and ultimately they were God's arena. He is our defense in those matters and sovereign over all such attacks. That does not mean we should ignore the education and understanding of the onslaught of the enemy, yet truth-be-told it is the personal 'demons' individually inside each us that pose the greatest treat. They are the real predators that can bring us down quicker than anything and anyone else.

The question to honestly ask ourselves today is, "what is our diet?" Am I attempting to live off of "junk food?" The reality is that many of us are being "filled" with the material things of the world. All of its spurious junk food, its sweet and empty calories, and heart and artery clogging fat. These things may taste good, but they also will slowly kill you. That's what sin does, I guess. And sometimes so slow it is nearly imperceptible.

"if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious." If truly you have, there should be all sorts of crazy things happening in your world, one of which is a great motivation to rid yourselves of the issues that ruin your spiritual appetite. Psalms 34:8 likely inspired Peter's words saying "*Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good; Blessed is the man who trusts in Him!*" One of the ways we know we have experienced such is that we quickly begin to crave that which we have "tasted." In doing so, we can find ourselves in some crazy places and crazy situations but we are there because that is where Jesus is and we want to be with Him and do what He is doing!

There used to be this little hole-in-the-wall joint up in North Minneapolis that cooked up Cajun wings. My buddy and I would go up there late at night...into that intense neighborhood, to get those wings. We probably were risking our very lives, but man they were SO good. Is that what Jesus and His Word does for you? Do you crave it? Do you desire His present power and manifest so much to let it drag you off into some crazy and inexplicable situations? Because that is the passionate life that Jesus wants to live out with you.

Have you tasted that the Lord is gracious? The NLT renders 1 John 2:17 as "*And this world is fading away, along with everything that people crave.*" Jesus desires that you lose your taste for the cheap and passing trifles of this world. Luther once said, "*Whosoever has not tasted the word... to him it is not sweet (if it) has not reached the heart; but to them who have experienced it, who with the heart believe, 'Christ has been sent for me and is become my own: my miseries are His, and His life mine,' it tastes sweet.*"

Robert Leighton writes....

Our natural desire for food arises principally from its necessity for the nourishment of our bodies. In addition to this there is a sweetness and pleasantness as we eat it that serves to sharpen our desire, and nature has given it to us for this purpose. Thus God's children, in their spiritual life, naturally desire the means of their nourishment and growth, as in this life we are always in a growing state. In addition, there is a spiritual delight and sweetness in the Word, for it reveals God, and this adds to their desire and stirs up their appetite for it. By the Word we grow, and in the Word we taste the graciousness of God.

While Christ indeed overwhelms His chosen with His love and His direct intervention, there still must come a response on our part. A response that is lived out in action. Not merely a *deciding* for Him, but a *coming to Him*. That means we go where He is. We follow Him where he leads. We agree with Him, and stand with Him, and follow Him as our Lord and Master.

How many of us are struggling today because we are still looking for the loving Jesus to come to us and comfort us where we are and in whatever situation we find ourselves? So often it never seems to occur to us that God might actually want to get us *out* of the situation we are in! In fact, that is a certainty when we come to Christ. As the months turn to years, the pressure to move out of our worldly pit will increase and sooner or later something must give: *you or your relationship with God*.

He wants us to *move out* of the world we were living in and into a world *HE* is living in. The reality of maturing in Christ is that there is a conscious and purposeful departure from our old residence and into the new one. Yet how many of us want Jesus *and* the world that we love and desire for ourselves in our flesh? We just want to *add* Jesus to the life we already have! But that's not rebirth...that's not the transformation of salvation.

These to whom Peter is writing are believers who were suffering in the face of persecution and trials. So Peter begins by stating that the answer was to move toward Jesus. That of course will naturally mean a 'closer scrutiny and direction.' We cannot grow up in our faith by staying put in the life we have always lived. Peter paints a picture of a house that is being built by Christ, in which we are the stones...the 'living stones.' Such a picture of course portrays the beautiful picture of the body of Christ...the church!

I have been up close and touched ancient castles in Europe. Construction that has lasted for hundreds of years. Walls built for strength, protection, and longevity. Walls made of rocks that together with other rocks create an awesome defense and a majestic building. But alone...those rocks are just one rock laying out in a field someplace. No value. No memorable purpose. No unified and timeless strength. Just 'in the way' and 'taking up space.'

There is a famous story from Sparta. A Spartan king boasted to a visiting monarch about the walls of Sparta. The visiting monarch looked around and could see no walls. He said to the Spartan king, "Where are these walls about which you boast so much?" His host pointed at his bodyguard of magnificent troops. "These," he said, "are the walls of Sparta, every man a brick." The point is clear. So long as a brick lies by itself it is useless; it becomes of use only when it is incorporated into a building. So it is with the individual Christian. To realize his destiny he must not remain alone, but must be built into the fabric of the Church. (www.preceptaustin.org)

Verse 8 tells the story: *"they stumble, being disobedient to the Word..."*. When we attempt to "go it alone" we are being disobedient to God's Word. It is just a flagrant act of pride on our part to think we need no one and have no responsibility to others in the body...in the wall of God's house.

Back in chapter 1 of this letter Peter had directed us to reject the desires of our old life ([1Pe 1:14](#)) and called upon us to pursue a holy walk ([1Pe 1:15-16](#)). We cannot ignore this simple premise...that holiness is a characteristic which must characterize our new life in Christ, for it is the proof that we indeed walk in His Spirit. We are reminded repeatedly throughout scripture that if there is not an obvious difference in your behavior after your profession of Christ as your Savior, then you need to honestly and sincerely look to your heart as to whether you have ever truly tasted of God's grace. Holy behavior will be the general direction of your life if you are truly in Christ. Indeed, "direction" does not mean "perfection." We all "blow it." Some days worse than others. But when the Spirit convicts us, He also enables us to get back up spiritually speaking, and to keep moving forward. If you do not get up, then what does that say? It is so important to take a "spiritual inventory" of your life on a regular basis." You can't afford not to do this, for eternity...*your forever*, is at stake!

It seems like it would be a 'no-brainer', but apparently it needs to be said: *"You cannot stay the same once you have become a born-again Christian."* Because factually you *"will not."* The power of the Spirit of God that is now a very part of you in your reborn state is going to change you. It is an absolute fact. We cannot with any shred of credibility claim we are reborn and remain the same! Verse 5 says we are to *"offer up spiritual sacrifices."* A sacrifice is something that costs...something of value that we offer up to God. Romans 12:1 says these sacrifices are our literal bodies. Romans 13:15 says they are also our worship and our thanks. Philippians 4:18 says they are also acts of love. But one thing is for sure, they are all issues of value...things I give to God when my flesh wants to keep them for myself. Things like our time, our finances, our service, and onward into our pride, our self-centeredness, my pleasures, and my wants.

Peter quotes Isaiah 28:16 in verse 6...where He is speaking of the coming Christ... *"Therefore thus says the Lord God, "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a tested stone, A costly cornerstone for the foundation, firmly placed. He who believes in it will not be disturbed."* (NAS) NLT says "...Whoever believes need never be shaken." And yet there are many of us indeed today that *are* disturbed! Unsettled and restless. So is the Word of God a lie? I am sure that such a passage does not infer that life will be without bumps or that we will never have a gloomy depressed day. It no doubt speaks of the greater picture. One which speaks of the nature of our living and the air of our being. But, the fact is, many of us are even yet...in a greater way, "disturbed." We are without joy, purpose, or passion, and we still want to believe we are God's kid. But something here is wrong.

It's all 'heating up' out there today. Those who stood on the fringes of the faith are falling away, and it is only going to get worse. Marginal Christianity, if it ever existed in any form, is all but gone now. There is no middle ground, no quiet spiritual rest areas, no "having your cake and eating it too." We are quite simply being called to "abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul." because we are supposed to be "sojourners" ...just folks passing through here, and yet so many folks claiming faith have roots that are deep into this world. So deep, that those roots are anchoring them to that world and keeping them from being a real part of God's house...keeping them from being a part of the "great wall of God's kingdom." Peter stops short of referring to these things blatantly as "sins" and we need to realize that a lot of the things that "war against our souls" are not biblical sin but simply weights that continually pull us down and keep us 'out of the game.' Peter is passionately calling us today. He says he "begs" us...

This last week, we saw the last stronghold of ISIS fall in Syria. I can't help but think back to late 2014 when ISIS released the video of them beheading the captured journalist Steven Sotloff. At his memorial service, Sotloff himself spoke via a letter smuggled out of captivity before his death. *"Please know I'm OK,"* said Sotloff in the letter. *"Live your life to the fullest...Everyone has two lives. The second one begins when you realize you only have one."* **Only one.**