

## Got Milk?

<sup>1</sup>Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. <sup>2</sup>Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, <sup>3</sup>now that you have tasted that the Lord is good. – 1 Peter 2:1-3

Peter's "Therefore" links what he writes here to his discussion of the new birth of the young believers he is addressing. Having obeyed the truth of the gospel, his readers have purified themselves and have begun to walk in love for their brothers (chapter 1:22, 23). But the new birth is just that, a birth. It is the beginning, not the end of the Christian experience. "Therefore," a new believer must take additional steps that are conducive to his pursuit of holiness.

This transformation begins as they begin to rid themselves of the vices that marked their lives before repentance. Those things Peter specifies are not an exhaustive list of anti-Christian behavior. These kinds of lists are very common throughout the New Testament. What Peter is saying is that a new believer must immediately begin to pursue, in practice, the reality of that which was symbolized at baptism – the putting off of the sinful nature and the putting on of the garments of Christ (Galatians 3:26, 27), the death to sin and the resurrection to newness of life (Romans 6:3, 4) as well as the pledge of a good conscience toward God (1 Peter 3:21). In an age where grace is preached without an appropriate emphasis on the proper human response to grace, many believers never really develop into fruitful servants of the kingdom, for they drag far too much baggage of the old life with them.

Peter addresses his readers as "newborn babies." One of the major characteristics of newborn babies is their craving for their mother's milk. Their appetite is actually quite voracious AND the milk is the only remedy that can calm a little guy who behaves as if he is sure that he is starving to death. By milk, Peter is probably speaking of the Word of God given the fact that he has already spoken of the "imperishable seed" of God's Word (chapter 1:23) as the instrument of our new birth. But, in addition to the Word, he could have in mind all the available nurture of the Christian community (which would not be true nurture at all apart from the Word of God).

In another passage and another context, milk is not used in such a positive sense. The writer of Hebrews refers to those Christians that have never moved beyond the most rudimentary teachings of the faith when he says, "You need milk, not solid food!" (Hebrews 5:12). Christians that are chronically static in the process of maturing in their faith are in no way prepared to stand up to the challenges of life in a world that is not favorably disposed to Christianity. But in this context, Peter's emphasis is on the unadulterated purity of milk as opposed to the "deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of surviving in this world according to the world's wisdom and methods. Peter's point is that we can only grow up into the holiness of God if our cravings and our diets are pure.

It is hard to imagine that the craving for purity or for the truth of God can be any more intense than it is at the moment a person first comes to faith in Christ. For the sake of future generations, we must begin to proclaim a more complete gospel – one that calls those who would turn to Christ for the forgiveness of their sins to yearn for a holiness in practice that reflects the promise of positional holiness – a gospel that demands that believers develop a craving for the pure, spiritual milk of God.

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