

Hope When Life is Hard...



A VERSE BY VERSE
EXPOSITION OF
THE EPISTLE OF
FIRST PETER

A Craving for the Gospel 1 Peter 2:1-3 (690)

We are all familiar with the expression “a Big Mac attack.” Of course, that refers to a craving for the famous MacDonald’s hamburger. Have you ever just had a hankering for some particular food and the craving just wouldn’t go away until satisfied? Last Christmas Katheryn and Skip spent Christmas Day with us. Of course, we had our usual big Tennessee breakfast – country ham, biscuits and gravy and all the rest. The kitchen was full of all kinds of other stuff to nibble on during the day. But about mid-afternoon Skip was overtaken by his usual craving for a fast food burger and fries. He called around until he found a place that was open and he drove over and got his junk food fix. Similarly, Christians are to crave the word.

With that story I introduce you to the big idea for this message. **The word is the believer’s spiritual sustenance.** The word that changed your heart is the same word that nourishes and strengthens it in grace. I want to express this a number of ways so you’ll be sure to get the big idea. Dr. Edmund Clowney says, “The same truth of God that gave us birth also nourishes us” (*1 Peter*, p. 78). And again, “Peter shows that the Lord who gave us new birth by the word also gives us growth by the word” (*1 Peter*, p. 80). Paul Achtemeier says, “It would,

furthermore, be appropriate for Christians who were rebegotten by the word of God to yearn for that word so they may experience further growth leading to salvation" (*1 Peter*, p. 147). Peter Davids, "Thus the Christians are encouraged to continue to steep themselves in the teaching about Jesus, not to leave it behind now that they have been converted. Indeed, it is by this that they not only came to birth but will also grow up" (*1 Peter*, p. 83). The word that changed your heart is the same word that nourishes and strengthens it in grace. **The word is the believer's spiritual sustenance.** This is what we shall see this morning in **1 Peter 2:1-3**, *Therefore, putting aside all malice and all guile and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, ² like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the word, that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, ³ if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord.*

In **1 Peter 1:1-12** the apostle sets before us the glories of the salvation which is promised and offered to us in the gospel. In verses **13-25** Peter explores how we should actually live in light of this grand vision of the grace of God in the salvation of sinners. He tells us that the glories of the gospel demand the grateful and obedient response of holiness (**1:13-16**), of reverence (**1:17-19**), and of brotherly affection (**1:22-25**). **Verse 22** says, *Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart.*

In **1:23-25** Peter explains the theological basis for the command to *love one another fervently from the heart*. He says, *for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and abiding word of God. 24 For, "All flesh is like grass, and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls off, 25 but the word of the Lord abides forever."* And this is the word which was preached to you. In the new birth the Holy Spirit communicates the

capacity to love one another by giving us a new heart. **Ezekiel 36:26-27**, *“Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.”* So we are those who have been called into a life of brotherly affection. Indeed, we have been born into a new family in which mutual love from the heart is the rule of conduct.

But how does God affect this amazing heart transformation? Here is the piece of calligraphy I have mentioned before and which I intend to hang in my office. It says, “Lord, Thou didst strike my heart with Thy word ... and I loved Thee.” So God affects this transformation *through the living and abiding word of God (1:23)*. But how does this take place? Martin Luther asked that same question. I want to review his answer with you:

“But how does this take place? After this manner: God lets the word, the Gospel, be scattered abroad, and the seed falls in the hearts of men. *Do you see in verse 23 where Luther gets this idea of seed? Not of seed which is perishable but imperishable.* Now wherever it sticks in the heart, the Holy Spirit is present and makes a new man. Then there will indeed be another man, of other thoughts, of other words and works. Thus you are entirely changed. All that you before avoided you now seek, and what you before sought that you now avoid” (Luther, *1 Peter*, p. 79). *That’s how Martin Luther describes this new birth by the word of God.*

Luther continues, “In respect to the birth of the body, it is a fact that when conception takes place the seed is changed, so that it is seed no longer. *Remember*

*the little oak seedling I showed you? But [the word] is a seed that cannot be changed; it remains forever” (Luther, 1 Peter, p. 79). Notice that Peter’s stress in verses 23-25 is on the permanence of the word – “not of seed which is perishable but imperishable” (1:23); “the living and abiding word of God” (1:23). To confirm this permanence Peter quotes **Isaiah 40:6-8** in verses 24 and 25 – “the grass withers and the flower falls off (1:24); the word of God abides forever” (1:25).*

“But [the word] is a seed that cannot be changed; it remains forever. It changes me, so that I am transformed in it, and whatever is evil in me from my nature passes away. Therefore it is indeed a wonderful birth, and of extraordinary seed” (Luther, 1 Peter, p. 79). One commentator says, “For Peter the focus of the passage is the word of God, which endures or remains forever, that is, can never be made ineffective” (Davids, 1 Peter, p. 79). Beloved, here’s the important point: Because the word is eternally effectual it is continually changing us.

Now look at chapter 2, verse 1. *Therefore* ... because it is true that the word is continually changing us ... *therefore, long for the word*. This is the only imperative in the passage. It is the main verb around which everything else in verses 1-3 orbits. Literally the text reads *long for the pure spiritual milk*. We may be confident that milk refers to the word of God. Milk is used metaphorically in **I Corinthians 3:2** (*I gave you milk to drink, not solid food*) and in **Hebrews 5:12** (*you have come to need milk and not solid food*). In both verses milk refers to a certain body of truth that a new Christian should be able to digest. That is not the idea in 1 Peter. Here milk refers to the written word of God. **Matthew 4:4**, *But [Jesus] answered and said, “It is written, ‘MAN SHALL NOT LIVE ON BREAD ALONE, BUT ON EVERY WORD THAT PROCEEDS OUT OF THE MOUTH OF GOD’ “* (quoting **Deut. 8:3**). Milk refers to the Scriptures of the Old and New

Testaments. Our Confession says, "The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture; unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men" (WCF, I, VI).

Indeed, Peter refers to this word as *pure*. **Psalm 119:140**, *Thy word is very pure, therefore Thy servant loves it*. The word of God is pure in that it is not watered down in any way. "Consumers in the ancient world were well aware that milk or wine could be watered down; when Paul says in II Corinthians 2:17 that he was not a huckster of the word of God, he alludes to the common practice of selling diluted wine. But this cannot be said of the word of God. The word of God is pure in that it is unadulterated, without any mixture of falsehood or error. The word is pure in that it requires no sweeteners or preservatives from man. The word of God is eternally perfect as it stands.

It is this beautiful, sweet, satisfying milk of the word that we are to *long for* or crave. To illustrate this Peter calls on the image of a nursing infant – *like newborn babes*. Surely most have noticed the eagerness with which a newborn child or even newborn animals seek out their mother's milk. Such an eagerness is to characterize the Christian. Such an appetite is a sure evidence of the new birth.

What is being called for here is ingestion, an intake, of the word. The spiritual diet for the believer is the word of God. **Jeremiah 15:16**, *Thy words were found and I did eat them*. **Psalm 119:103**, *How sweet are Thy words to my taste! Yes, sweeter than honey to my mouth!* **Ezekiel 3:1-3**, *Then He said to me, "Son of man, eat what you*

find; eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel.” So I opened my mouth, and He fed me this scroll. And He said to me, “Son of man, feed your stomach, and fill your body with this scroll which I am giving you.” Then I ate it, and it was sweet as honey in my mouth. As rice is the staple diet in the Far East ... as vegetables, fruits, and whole grains were the staple diet of the American Indians “the word of God must be the believer’s staple diet. The word is the believer’s spiritual sustenance.

I see no way that this intake of God’s word can be separated from something that we actually do. The word of God is not like some “patch.” You can’t stick a Bible on your arm and just absorb the word into your heart and mind. There are Biblically prescribed ways by which to take in the word of God. Hearing the word. **Romans 10:17** (Ph), *Faith, you see, can only come from **hearing** the message, and the message is the word of Christ.* Reading the word. **Deuteronomy 17:19** (LB), *[The Scriptures] shall be his constant companion. He must **read** from it every day of his life so that he will learn to respect the Lord his God by obeying all of his commands.* Studying the word. **Acts 17:11** (Ph), *they accepted the message most eagerly and **studied** the Scripture every day.* Memorizing the word. **Proverbs 7:2-3** (LB), *Guard my words as your most precious possession. Write them down, and also **keep them deep within your heart.*** Meditating on the word. **Psalms 1:2-3** (LB), *[Those who] are always **meditating** on his laws ... are like trees along a river bank bearing luscious fruit. Their leaves shall never wither, and all they do shall prosper.* The word is the believer’s spiritual sustenance.

Now, what is the end or purpose for this ingestion of the word of God? ***That you may grow in respect to salvation.*** Dietician Clare Armstrong explains, “Poor nutrition leads to poor health ... Malnutrition is an imbalance or deficiency of nutrients ... [One] type of malnutrition is the deprivation of food. This leads to

[progressive emaciation]. This diet does not have enough protein, fat carbohydrates, calories and other important nutrients. Children on this diet form the classic picture of malnutrition. They are skin and bones. The body begins to break down muscle to get protein and it draws on all its stored fat and carbohydrates. The ability to fight infection is low. The metabolism slows down to save calories. This is a serious condition. Once the body goes through all of its stored energy, death is the result.” Everybody in this room today looks pretty healthy physically. But, mark it down! Not a few even here are spiritually reduced to skin and bones because you have neglected to nourish yourselves on the word of God.

Notice that it is *in respect to salvation* that we are to grow. Unfortunately some of us entertain inadequate views of spiritual growth. Often we interpret growth in terms of performance. I attend church regularly. I pray each morning. I am growing. For others growth is interpreted in terms of participation. I’m involved in this ministry and that ministry. I’m growing. For still others growth is interpreted in terms of raw Biblical and theological knowledge. In Reformed churches these folks are all over the place. I’m mature because I know more than Joe Schmo over there. For others growth is interpreted in terms of subjective effect. I must be growing because I am more often and more deeply moved by the gospel.

Now all of these contribute to our spiritual growth and, indeed, are evidences or expressions of spiritual development. However, the growth Peter has in mind is *in respect to salvation*. What he’s talking about is increase in the comfort of the gospel. What he’s talking about is increase in delight in the Author of our salvation. What he’s talking about is increase in the joy of our salvation, increase

in gratitude for our salvation, and increase in the assurance of our salvation. It is growth begun and sustained by the gospel.

But pastor, what about **verse 1**? Beloved, **verses 1-3** are a continuation not only of the theme of the word but also of the theme of brotherly love introduced in 1:22. We need to recognize that growth is also increase in love for those who share the same salvation - our brothers and sisters in the community of faith.

Verse 1 teaches that we are to rid ourselves of every sinful attitude and habit that is contrary to such love. *Therefore, putting aside all malice and all guile and hypocrisy and envy and all slander.* “The Greek, brought out in most translations, is literally put off, discard, like so much old, soiled and unwanted clothing” (Hillyer, *1 Peter*, p. 56). Peter lists five vices – malice, guile, hypocrisy, envy, and slander. I want to explain these five before we draw any conclusions and make a few observations.

“**Malice** is the desire to harm other people, which often hides behind apparently good actions (2:16) ... [**Deceit**] is the deliberate attempt to mislead other people by telling lies [shading the truth, not telling the whole story]. [Guile] is mentioned again as something to be shunned in **3:10**, and Christians are reminded that [deceit] was conspicuously absent from the behavior of Christ (**2:22**) ... **Hypocrisy** is the kind of deceit in which persons pretend to be different from what they really are, and especially that they are acting from good motives when in reality they are motivated by selfish desire. **Envy**, the longing for what other people have, needs no comment. Finally, **slander** is literally ‘talking down’ other people (*running them down*)” (Marshall, *1 Peter*, p. 62). Christians can slander one another outright. Unfortunately, Christians also cloak their slander under the guise of a prayer request or a “concern.”

How do these relate to what Peter has just said? His emphasis in verses 23-25 is on the permanence of the Word isn't it? That it is abiding, eternal. First, these five are vices of time and of earth. They are part of our life in the flesh. To the degree that we are focused on eternity we will be less inclined to nurse and feed upon these particular sins. Second, these five are contrary to brotherly love (1:22). They are polar opposites of what is commanded in 1:22. They are foul things that destroy friendships, marriages, families, and churches. These things poison our life together. "The expressions of evil that Peter lists are all such as militate against Christian fellowship" (Hillyer, p. 56). These particular sins are community-busters. To our shame we all too often tolerate them in the church today. If we are to *love one another fervently from the heart* these things have to go. Peter hammers this point. Remember Peter is writing to believers who are suffering. They were taking fire from outside. Beloved, bickering and division *within the fellowship* makes us all the more vulnerable to collapsing under the pressure that comes to us from outside the church. Peter's antidote is ridding ourselves of those damaging vices by "feeding on Christ the living Word through the inspired written Scriptures" (Hillyer, p. 58). **2 Peter 3:18, but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.**

Now that you have tasted that the Lord is good is virtually a straight quotation from **Psalm 34:8**. The assumption is that this is, in fact their experience. This brief statement is an additional encouragement to nourish themselves on the word. The reference is to the kindness and goodness of God that they first tasted in their new birth. I remember my own conversion. I recall the peace, the freedom, the newness that attended the regeneration of my own soul. And these were all good things. I was assured that life in Christ was indeed a good thing.

And all of that was mine by the grace of God through the instrumentality of the word of God. **1:23**, *for you have been born again through the living and abiding word of God.* And it is that same word that is now to be our diet, our desire, our delight. The word that changed your heart is the same word that nourishes and strengthens it in grace. The gospel is the believer's spiritual sustenance.

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1 Peter 2:1-3 (690)

The big idea for this message:

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The word that _____ your heart is the same word that
_____ and strengthens it in grace.

1 Peter 2:1-3, *Therefore, putting aside all malice and all guile and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, ² like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the word, that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, ³ if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord.*

1 Peter 1:1-12 ... the glories of the salvation that is promised and offered to us in the gospel

1 Peter 1:13-25 ... how we should actually live in light of this grand vision ... holiness (**1:13-16**), reverence (**1:17-19**), and brotherly affection (**1:22-25**)

1 Peter 1:23-25 ... the theological basis for the command to *love one another fervently from the heart*

God affects this transformation
through the living and abiding word of God (1:23)

Martin Luther's explanation

"But how does this take place? After this manner: God lets the word, the Gospel, be scattered abroad, and the seed falls in the hearts of men. Now wherever it sticks in the heart, the Holy Spirit is present and makes a new man. Then there will indeed be another man, of other thoughts, of other words and works. Thus you are entirely changed. All that you before avoided you now seek, and what you before sought that you now avoid. In respect to the birth of the body, it is a fact that when conception takes place the seed is changed, so that it is seed no longer. But [the word] is a seed that cannot be changed; it remains forever. It changes me, so that I am transformed in it, and whatever is evil in me from my nature passes away. Therefore it is indeed a wonderful birth, and of extraordinary seed" (Luther, *1 Peter*, p. 79).

Here's the important point:

Because the word is eternally effectual it is _____ us.

Therefore ... long for the word

Like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the word

What is being called for here is _____, an intake, of the word.

The spiritual _____ for the believer is the word of God

(Jer. 15:16; Ps. 119:103; Ez. 3:1-3).

There are Biblically prescribed ways by which to take in the word of God.

_____ the word (Rom. 10:17)

_____ the word (Deut. 17:19)

_____ the word (Acts 17:11)

_____ the word (Prov. 7:2-3)

_____ on the word (Ps. 1:2-3)

*That you may grow
in respect to salvation*

What he's talking about is increase in the _____ of the gospel.

What he's talking about is increase in _____ in the Author of our salvation.

What he's talking about is increase in the _____ of our salvation,

increase in _____ for our salvation,

and increase in the _____ of our salvation.

It is growth begun and sustained by the gospel.

We need to recognize that growth is also increase in _____ for those who share the same salvation - our brothers and sisters in the community of faith.

*Therefore, putting aside all malice and all guile and hypocrisy and
envy and all slander*

These five are _____ to brotherly love (1:22).

They are polar _____ of what is commanded in 1:22.

These things _____ our life together.

Now that you have tasted that the Lord is good