

Longing for the Word
1 Peter 2:1-3

Introduction

I was going through Nehemiah this week in my regular Bible reading and was struck by the parallel with what happened when Ezra read the law to the people and the passage we will study this morning in 1 Peter 2:1-3. It also parallels what happened in the Reformation in the sixteenth century as I will point out in a few minutes. Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem and rebuilt the wall around Jerusalem in 444 BC. Nehemiah 8 records that the people then gathered in the square in front of the Water Gate and asked Ezra to bring out the book of the law of Moses and read it to them. He was at a location above the people standing at a podium which had been made for this purpose. He began at the light of morning and read until mid-day. When he opened the book, all the people stood up. As he read from the book, it was also translated to give the sense so that the people could understand what had been read. After 70 years in captivity, the younger people would have been taught Aramaic and would not have understood Hebrew. The Levites also then explained the law to the people so they would be able to apply it to their lives.

It is actually this passage that forms a basis for what we do as well in our own time. We have you stand for our Scripture reading as a demonstration of respect for it. When I point out a Hebrew or Greek word I also give an English translation of it so that you will understand the meaning of the word. I then explain the text in the sermon so that you will be able to live according to it. While this was true in Ezra's time, and it was true in the early church, and it is true in our own time in many churches, it has not been true throughout most of history nor is it any longer true in most self proclaimed "churches."

It was not long after Ezra that Judaism descended again into the traditions of men and departed from the actual word of God. This was a major point of contention between Jesus and the religious leaders of that time. The preaching of Jesus and the apostles returned the people to the word of God, and though the early church had to battle false teachers and sinful schisms, the early Christians would go back to the Scriptures to know the truth and find direction for their lives. Persecution kept the church fairly pure until Emperor Constantine issued the Edict of Toleration in AD 311 and Edict of Milan in AD 313 which made Christianity legal in the empire, and in AD 379 Theodosius I declared Christianity to be the religion of the Empire and began persecution of other religions. After that, false converts flooded into the church to escape persecution and gain favorable positions. The church became the religious arm of the empire which allowed both political hierarchy and paganism into it supplanting the word of God as the authority over the centuries. True Christians who followed the Bible as God's word and final authority were persecuted by the Roman Catholic Church. When Martin Luther posted his 95 Theses on the door of the church in Wittenberg, the smoldering fires of those wanting the word of God burst into the open flames of the reformation which returned the Scriptures to the people resulting in the rapid growth of true Christianity. So happy Reformation Sunday as we rejoice over being able to study God's word for ourselves.

The response of the people to Ezra's reading of God's commandments was immediate. They recognized their failure in keeping the law and so there was mourning and weeping. However, Ezra pointed out that it was a day that was holy to Yahweh and he encouraged them, "*Do not be grieved, for the joy of Yahweh is your strength.*" He then sent them to "*celebrate a great festival because they had understood the words which had been made known to them.*" That included instructions on the Feast of Booths which they then observed for the next seven days and held a solemn assembly on the eighth according to the ordinance.

Chapter 9 records that two weeks later they held another assembly with fasting, sack cloth and ashes as they confessed their sins and worshiped Yahweh their God. They then “*separated themselves from the peoples of the lands to the law of God*” and took on “*themselves a curse and an oath to walk in God’s law, which was given through Moses, God’s servant, and to keep and to observe all the commandments of God our Lord, and His ordinances and His statutes.*” The passage then goes on to list their specific actions and promises in reversing the things they had previously done.

Their longing to know God resulted in them honoring His word and obeying His commandments. The same truth is seen 1 Peter 2 in the longing of those to whom he was writing for the word of God and their obedience to it. I will read through verses 1-12, then we will examine in detail the first three verses.

¹ “*Therefore, putting 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,* ³ *if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord.* ⁴ *And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God,* ⁵ *you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.* ⁶ *For this is contained in Scripture: “Behold, I lay in Zion a choice stone, a precious corner stone, And he who believes in Him will not be disappointed.”* ⁷ *This precious value, then, is for you who believe; but for those who disbelieve, “The stone which the builders rejected, This became the very corner stone,”* ⁸ *and, “A stone of stumbling and a rock of offense”; for they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this doom they were also appointed.* ⁹ *But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;* ¹⁰ *for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.* ¹¹ *Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul.* ¹² *Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.”*

Results of Being Born Again - 1 Peter 2:1

The verse begins, “*Therefore,*” which immediately points back to what Peter has just written as the basis for what he is now writing to those scattered throughout the Roman provinces of Asia Minor who were elect by the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit though the obedience of faith to be cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ (vs. 1-3). According to God’s great mercy He caused them to be born again to a living hope and an incredible inheritance in heaven guaranteed and protected by God (vs. 4-5). This was a source of comfort for them enabling them to rejoice though distressed by their various trials (vs. 6-9). Genuine salvation produced in them a quest for personal holiness (vs. 13-21). They had been born again by the imperishable word of God resulting in their purification of their souls in obedience to the truth demonstrated by a sincere and fervent love for one another from the heart (vs. 22-25).

This “therefore” also explains the verb, ἀποτίθημι / aptithāmi, translated as “putting” or “laying aside.” Though it sounds like command in most English translation, this is not an imperative telling them what they ought to do. It is an aorist, middle participle stating what they should have already done which would be a consequence of being born again by God to live in obedience to the truth and sincerely and fervently love each other from the heart. The evils in the list that follows are all things that are opposite of such love.

The word itself means to “lay aside; take off; put away.” The sense of the word is brought out in Acts 7:58 in describing the witnesses who stripped off their robes to lay them aside at the feet of Saul before they stoned Stephen. The common metaphorical use then is to stop doing something by taking it off and laying it aside. Paul uses this same word in Ephesians 4:22-24 in directing the Christian to actively “lay

aside” the old self and its sinful manner of life and put on the new self which reflects righteousness and holiness of the truth. James 1:21 uses it in reference to “*putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness.*” Hebrews 12:1 uses it in a general call to “*lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.*”

Peter applies this verb to “strip off, lay aside” to five evil character traits which are contrary to the new spiritual life given by God to those who are born again - malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy and slander. Paul gives a similar lists in Colossians 3:8-9,⁸ “*But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth.*”⁹ “*Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices.*”

All Malice - note first that this is “all” malice. There is no room for any residue of it in the Christian’s life. Malice here, κακία / kakia, is the quality of an evil that men do to one another that destroys fellowship which originates from our sin nature. It is “*a feeling of hostility and strong dislike, with a possible implication of desiring to do harm*” (Louw-Nida). Kistemaker describes it as “*a desire to inflict pain, harm, or injury on our fellow man.*” It is a quality of the depraved mind described in Romans 1:28-32. Paul gives warnings or commands against it five times (Rom. 1:29; 1 Cor. 14:20; Eph. 4:31; Col. 3:8; Titus 3:3).

Malice is a quality that is the opposite of the love Christians are to have for one other. Malice is antagonistic toward others and destroys relationships while Christians are to love one another just as Jesus loved us with compassion and self-sacrifice for the benefit of others (John 13:34) which builds relationships. A Christian is to have the humility of mind to regard others more important than himself and look out for their interests and not just his own (Phil. 2:3-4).

All Deceit - is next, and note again that this is comprehensive. All deceit without exception is to be left behind. Deceit, δόλος / dolos, is from a root which means “bait.” It is translated as deceit, treachery, stealth, craftiness, cunning and describes the use of trickery and falsehood to gain what is desired. It is another characteristic of the depraved mind described in Romans 1:28-32. The chief priests and elders “*plotted together to seize Jesus by stealth / trickery and kill Him*” (Matthew 26:3). In Acts 13:7 Paul rebuked Elymas the magician for seeking to keep the proconsul of Paphos on Cyprus from the faith saying, “*You who are full of all deceit and fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease to make crooked the straight ways of the Lord?*” Paul then called on the Lord to blind Elymas, which He did, resulting in the proconsul believing Paul. There was no deceit in Jesus or in His preaching (1 Peter 2:22), nor was there any deceit in Paul’s exhortations (1 Thessalonians 2:3).

This is another quality that is opposite of love for love rejoices in truth (1 Cor. 13:6) while deceit is full of falsehood while seeking to appear as truth. Deceit is crafty lying. Deceit destroys relationships because trust is foundational to any relationship, and deceit destroys trust. All of us have been deceived, even if it was just by slick marketing devises to get us to purchase something that in the end was not as advertised, so we all know what that feels like. It is currently election season, so we are all being assaulted by deceitful candidates, some of whom are so brazen and smooth in their lies that it almost seems like it would be an error in judgment not to believe them. Much worse by far than any of these is when you are deceived by someone who you were led to believe was a friend. Deceit is contrary to love.

Hypocrisy, ὑποκρίσις / hupokrsis, is next on the list. Hypocrisy is “*to give an impression of having certain purposes or motivations, while in reality having quite different ones*” (Louw-Nida). A hypocrite is someone that pretends to be what he is not. Kistemaker notes that “*deceit and hypocrisy are twins; by deceit a person is wronged and by hypocrisy he is deceived.*” The word originally meant “to explain,” “to interpret,” and came to be used for actors who would interpret a poem or play. The role of an actor is to play the role assigned to him to make the audience think of the person being portrayed and not the

actor himself. That could be positive, negative or neutral, but eventually it became used more negatively for someone that portrayed himself to be something he was not. Jesus used it this way a lot in reference to the religious leaders - fourteen times in Matthew. They could see the speck in someone else's eye while ignoring the log in their own (Matthew 7:3-5). They honored God with their lips but their hearts were far from God just as Isaiah had warned (Matthew 15:7-8).

Hypocrisy and lying generally go hand in hand, but be careful, for the easiest person to deceive is yourself, so it is not hard to find hypocrites that believe their own lies and do not recognize the contradictions in their own belief system or actions. Pride only makes the matter worse. I have met plenty of people in churches that in the end turned out to be great hypocrites. They portrayed themselves to be what they were not in reality. Their profession and manner of life did not match. Barclay comments that a hypocrite in the church *"is a man whose alleged Christian profession is for his own profit and prestige and not for the service and glory of Christ."*

Non-Christians often use hypocrisy among professing Christians as an excuse for their unbelief, yet they are quite blind to their own pride and hypocrisy. Hypocrisy in the church can be bad since there are tares among the wheat - false brethren mixed in with the true. In addition, all Christians are being conformed into the image of Christ, but they are not there yet so there will still be sin and failure to live up to what is desired. However, hypocrisy outside the church is much, much worse. Professional conventions of full of all sorts of proud people trying to puff themselves up even more. Sales conventions are exercises in marketing products in which few live up to the claims, and political conventions are where lying is an art form. Even what is now normal office politics reveals the prevalence of hypocrisy.

The reality is that believers are to be humble and be on a quest for truth, and both are strong preventive measure against hypocrisy. Believers are to be quick to apologize and ask for forgiveness whenever they are less than what God wants them to be. Add to this that because Christian love does not seek its own, there is no reason to pretend to be something you are not. And because believers are assured of God's love for them proven at the cross, they can risk being real and vulnerable because their self-worth is not based in what the world values or what others think of them.

Envy, φθόνος / phthonos, is next in the list. It is *"a state of ill will toward someone because of some real or presumed advantage experienced by such a person"* (Louw-Nida). Paul points out in Titus 3:3 that it, along with malice, foolishness, disobedience, enslavement to lusts and pleasures, and hate was a mark our own sinfulness before God saved us. The fact that these no longer are characteristics of the Christian demonstrates the radical change that comes by God's grace through faith in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Pride and envy go together because pride cannot stand someone else ranking higher, being better liked, having greater ability, etc., because it wants those things for itself. Pilate recognized that in the Jewish religious leaders so he knew they had brought Jesus to him out of envy to be tried (Matt. 27:18). Envy is corrosive to the individual. A Greek proverb describes this saying, *"As rust corrupts iron, so envy corrupts man."* It is also in the list of characteristics of depravity listed in Romans 1:28-32. It is also included in the deeds of the flesh (Gal. 5:21). Envy is contrary to love which is neither jealous, arrogant or brags (1 Cor. 13:4).

All Slander is the last characteristic in the list. This one is also comprehensive stating that all slander is to be put off and laid aside. The word here, καταλαλία / katalalia, is a compound word combining "against" with "speak" and hence, "to speak against" with a connotation of that speech being evil and so translated as "evil speech" and "slander." Its cognate, slanderer, is included in the list of kinds of people who have a depraved mind in Romans 1:28-32.

The Septuagint uses the verb form of this word nine times translated variously as slander, scorn, mock, revile and insult. The Psalmist laments the reproach and reviling of his enemies against him (Psalm 44:15-16). Job endured the insults of those who were supposed to be his friends (Job 19:3). But the word is most often used in slander against God (Num. 21:5, 7; Psalm 78:19; Hosea 7:13; Malachi 3:13).

Slander can arise directly from malice and envy since malice has a disposition of ill will toward others and envy becomes an additional motivation for expressing it. But it can also be part of hypocrisy and deceit since what is said to others about you can be very different from what they would say to you directly. The hypocrite will flatter you while slandering you behind your back because that is part of the deceit.

No slander of any kind against anyone should be part of a Christian's speech. It is contrary to the kindness that is part of Christian love, and it is directly against the command given in Ephesians 4:29 and similar passages which directs Christians to *"Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear."*

Malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy and slander are all contrary to the character of those who are born again by God's grace through faith in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. We have been radically changed by the Holy Spirit as He sanctifies us and conforms us into the image of Christ. We are to be marked by the opposite characteristics of a pursuit of purity through obedience to the truth and developing a sincere and fervent love for one another from the heart.

Longing for the Word - 1 Peter 2:2

Peter continues on in verse 2 to bring up a second characteristic of those who are born again. *"Like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the word."*

The analogy used here is easily recognizable to anyone who has had a baby or been around them. A newborn is quite fixated on getting fed and will make sure you know when he is craving to eat again. For a newborn, life depends on getting the next meal. I think Peter is using this particular analogy as a reference back to his remarking twice that God has caused them to be born again. That is the context for verse 1. It is because they are born again that they are characterized by a fervent love for one another instead of the sinful characteristics opposite of love that are common to the unsaved. Because they have been spiritually born again they should desire earnestly the spiritual food of the milk of the word of God as much as a physical baby longs for his mother's milk.

The word "long" here, ἐπιποθέω / epipotheō, is an aorist active imperative, so it is a command to long for something with a deep desire with the implication that there is a recognition of the lack of that thing. It is variously translated as "long for, deeply desire, desire intensely, yearn for." Kistemaker brings out the intensity of this by translating it as "crave." Paul uses it to express the longing of Christians to see each other; he for the Romans (1:11), the Philippians (1:8), and Timothy (2:14); the brethren for the Corinthians (2 Cor. 9:14); Epaphroditus for the Philippians (2:26); and the Thessalonians to see Paul & Silas (1 Thess. 3:6). More significantly, this is the word used in 2 Corinthians 5:1-8 for saints, especially older ones whose physical bodies are declining, as they *"grown, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven . . ."* wanting *"what is mortal to be swallowed up by life . . ."* and *"prefer to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord."* This same Greek word is used in the Septuagint in Psalm 42:1 to describe the longing of a deer for the water brooks.

The phrase is translated here as *"pure milk of the word"* (NASB, NKJV), *"sincere milk of the word"* (KJV), *"pure spiritual milk"* (ESV, Holman, NIV), *"unadulterated spiritual milk"* (Lexham), *"pure mental milk of the word"* (Darby), and *"the word's pure milk"* (Young's). There is no problem with the word pure, ἀδόλος / adolos, which is the negation of the word used earlier for deceit, so it means "without deceit," "without anything impure in it" and hence "unadulterated." What comes from God is

very different than what comes from man for “*God is not a man that He should lie, nor a son of man that He should repent*” (Numbers 23:16; see also Hebrews 6:18). There is also no problem with the word milk, γάλα, gala, which refers the milk of any animal which nourishes its offspring, and here the context is an obvious figurative reference to the nourishment received that enables those born again to grow in respect to salvation.

The difficulty is with the Greek word translated as either “word” or “spiritual” which is λογικός / logikos. It means “*belonging to speech*” or “*belonging to reason*” for its root is the term for “word.” We get our English term “logic” from this word, so it is also translated as “reasonable” (Rom. 12:1, NKJV). The context here clearly connects it to the source of nourishment for the spirit since it causes growth in respect to salvation, and so some translators use “spiritual” to connect it to the divine reason which is the governor of all things which also matches the philosophical Stoic use of the term. However, the near context of 1 Peter 1:23-25 which makes direct reference to the word of God favors this as a reference to the word. Darby’s translation which incorporates both ideas may be the best way to understand the fullness of what is meant - “*the pure mental milk of the word.*”

I have seen this desire to know God’s word over and over with new Christians. The new spiritual life in them causes them to long to know God more and therefore they have a hunger to know and understand His word. Some I have known have read through the whole Bible within weeks or even days of being saved as adults. That is on the extreme side, but it is normal for the new Christian to want to start reading the Bible and to understand what is being read even if it is difficult for them. Those who do not read well want to hear it and listen to sermons that explain it. Frankly, I am concerned when someone makes a profession of faith but shows little or no interest in knowing God’s word. While that could result from either ignorance or misplaced fear of it, something is not right, for as Peter points out here, what is normal is for those who are born again to crave the pure milk of the word. Some babies figure out how to feed very quickly on their own while others have to be taught, but either way, the newborn longs to eat.

Growing in Salvation - 1 Peter 2:2

The last phrase in verse 2 gives us the main verb and therefore the key thought in this passage. The longing for the nourishment of God’s word is “*so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation.*” As a child feeds on milk, he grows. As a Christian feeds on God’s word, he grows. That is normal and it what is to be expected. The reference here to salvation is not to becoming saved as if living according to these qualities will bring you salvation. That would be contrary to what Peter has already stated in the first chapter concerning election and God causing them to be born again to a living hope and incredible inheritance which God Himself guards. This is a reference to growing in the qualities that come with being born again that he has already mentioned. That would include a living hope in the present that transcends present distress from trials so that your faith is proven and demonstrated by rejoicing in the midst of them to the praise, glory and honor of Jesus Christ (1:3-8). It includes having a mind ready for action, being sober in spirit and having a hope fixed on the grace of God (1:13). It includes resistance to your former desires and instead pursuing holiness in reflection of God because you have been redeemed by the blood of Christ from your former futile way of life (1:14-19). It includes purification of your soul though obedience to the truth resulting in a sincere, fervent love for the brethren from the heart (1:22-23). It includes a longing for the living and enduring word of God (1:23; 2:2) and a putting aside of the former evil qualities that are contrary to love - malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy and slander (2:1). You grow in these in the present and they will be experienced in their fullness in the future when you receive your inheritance reserved in heaven for you (1:4; 9). Salvation is past going back to God’s election and His causing you to be born again at a point in time. It is present in being radically changed to live as a child of God. It is future when we receive our inheritance and the struggle against sin in this world will be past.

Tasting the Kindness of the Lord - 1 Peter 2:3

Peter concludes this part of the passage with a first class conditional statement of an assumed fact, *“if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord.”* The word taste here, γεύομαι / geuomai, is the word for the physical sense of taste experienced by the tongue, but it is frequently used to refer to personally experiencing something which is its usage here. Kindness here, χρηστός, chrāstos, is “kind; good, benevolent,” and refers in this context to all of God’s kindness in bringing about salvation. In English, the full sense then is *“since you have personally experienced the kindness of the Lord, then these things should be true of you.”* As those who have been feeding on the word of God, they should be growing in all these areas. You may not be as mature as you want to be and as you will be some day, but you certainly should be more spiritually mature than you were.

This is an allusion to Psalm 34:8, *“O taste and see that Yahweh is good, How blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him.”* Since Peter uses the term Lord to refer to Jesus in this epistle, this allusion also indirectly points to the deity of Jesus by equating Him with Yahweh in the Hebrew scriptures.

Conclusions

Have you tasted the kindness of the Lord? Have you received His gracious gift of salvation from sin through faith in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ who paid the ransom price for your sin when He died at Calvary? His resurrection proves His claims and promises are true. If so, then you should have a hunger to know God and therefore a strong desire to learn His word and follow its precepts. That is the mark of a true Christian.

If that is not true of you, then it can be. It is a matter of believing what God has revealed about Himself and His will and trusting Him . You too can have a living hope and a promise of an incredible inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, unfading and guaranteed reserved in heaven for you. Talk with myself or any of our church leaders and we would be happy to explain the good news of Jesus Christ to you and answer your questions.

If you have tasted of the goodness of God in the past but you are not walking with Him as you know you should, then you also talk with myself or any of our church leaders and let us help you get back on track and walking the right path. Part of the purpose of the church is to help one another mature in Christ (Eph. 2:11-16) for we are all part of one body, the body of Christ.

Introduction

Nehemiah 8

Departure from God's word

The importance of the Reformation

The response to God's word - Nehemiah 8-9

1 Peter 1:1-12

Results of Being Born Again - 1 Peter 2:1

“Therefore”

ἀποτίθημι / aptithāmi = “*putting or laying aside.*”

Put aside all malice

Put aside all deceit

Put aside hypocrisy

Put aside envy

Put aside all slander

Longing for the Word - 1 Peter 2:2

ἐπιποθέω / epipotheō = “long for, deeply desire, desire intensely, yearn for”

Pure milk

λογικός / logikos = *belonging to reason*

The desire of new Christians

Growing in Salvation - 1 Peter 2:2

Tasting the Kindness of the Lord - 1 Peter 2:3

Conclusion

KIDS KORNER

Parents, you are responsible to apply God’s Word to your children’s lives. Here is some help.

Young Children - draw a picture about something you hear during the sermon. Explain your picture(s) to your parents at lunch. **Older Children** - Do one or more of the following: 1) Write down all the verses mentioned in the sermon and look them up later. 2) Count how many times the word “love” is mentioned. Talk with your parents about the contrast between Christian love and sinful characteristics of malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy & slander.

THINK ABOUT IT!

Questions to consider in discussing the sermon with others. Read Nehemiah 8. What is the historical setting? How do modern evangelical churches follow the pattern of Ezra in this chapter? Why did Judaism depart from God’s word? Why was the early church relatively pure? What brought about its departure from God’s word? What did the reformation do and why was that so important? According to 1 Peter 1, what are the results of being born again? Describe the radical nature of “putting off” in 1 Peter 2:1? Describe each of the following and contrast with Christian love (1 Cor. 13): Malice; Deceit, Hypocrisy, Envy, Slander. What is the importance of the word “all” used with three of these evils? Describe in your own words or with a story the longing of a newborn for milk. Why does Peter use this analogy for describing a new believer’s longing for God’s word? Why is it described as *pure milk*? Why the differences in translating λογικός / logikos in 1 Peter 2:2? How does the word of God cause growth with respect to salvation? What does it mean to *grow unto salvation*? Why should that be normal? What are some possible reasons a professing Christian may not grow? What does it mean to *taste the kindness of the Lord*? Have you tasted that kindness? If so, how well are you growing spiritually? If not, why not? What is blocking you?