

EXPOSITION OF I PETER

Message #6

I Peter 2:1-3

We receive a lot of literature in the mail about church growth and about how we are supposed to market the church. In fact, I just received a mailing this week that said if we would go to this gathering for only \$117 we could feel the lasting impact of a ministry that would break the mold and multiply my pastoral impact for the rest of my life. What I found so interesting about this mailing is that it said that this would be an opportunity to really meet “with the greatest Christian thinkers in the world!” As I looked over the list of men, having read a couple of their writings, I thought they may be great Christian thinkers, but they aren’t great Biblical expounders. They may know things about numerical expansion, but they don’t know much about Biblical exposition.

As we have already observed, the Apostle Peter really zeroes in on the importance of the Word of God in this context. He uses four different Greek words are used to reveal key concepts of the Word:

- 1) The Word of God is the only real truth (αληθεις) - **1:22**
- 2) The Word of God is the revealed truth (λογος) - **1:23; 2:2**
- 3) The Word of God is the spoken truth (ρημα) - **1:25**
- 4) The Word of God is the written truth (γραφη) - **2:6**

Peter wanted believers to realize that a key to their survival, a key to their holiness, a key to their joy, when going through difficult times in life, is to keep one’s focus on the Word of God. The conjunction “therefore” (**2:1**) connects chapter 1 with chapter 2 and is a logical and natural consequence of God using His Word to cause us to be born again. That is precisely the theme of this text:

GOD’S PEOPLE MAY CONTINUE TO GROW EVEN WHEN SUFFERING IF THEY MAINTAIN AN INTENSE DESIRE OR CRAVING TO KNOW GOD’S INSPIRED AND WRITTEN WORD AND GET RID OF OLD CORRUPTING INFLUENCES.

When God’s people are hurting, they can begin to implode. God wants His church becoming a loving family unit. Outside pressure can really put pressure on the family of God and instead of the church being a place where good things are taking place, it can become a place of negative backbiting and gossip and trouble. All of this stifles growth. Peter knew a critical key to survival was to keep a solid focus on the Word of God.

Now before we begin our journey through this text, there are a couple of observations we want to make.

Observation #1 - When Peter refers to the “pure” word, he uses a rare Greek word (αδολος) which was a word that referred to liquids that were genuine, pure, uncontaminated and not watered down (G. Abbott-Smith, p. 10). **So the thing that causes us to grow is a focus on God’s Word when it is accurately handled or rightly divided. It is not just any Bible study that will enable you to grow, it is Bible study that is not watered down.**

Observation #2 - When Peter uses the noun “milk” in reference to the Word, he does not mean the same thing Paul and the writer of Hebrews meant. The Apostle Paul and the writer of Hebrews use the term milk in a negative sense, referring to a very shallow grasp of Scripture and a lacking spirituality (I Corinthians 3:1-2; Hebrews 5:13). Peter is using the term milk not in a negative context in which milk needs to be replaced by meat, he is using it in the context of the necessary food needed for growth. Peter’s use is very positive.

Some denominations claim they are feeding people the meat of the Word; however, it is a contaminated Word. It is not pure and it is not meat and it is not pure milk and the people will not grow strong, they will be anemic.

Now there are **four key points** that Peter desires to make in these verses in order to motivate God’s people to maintain an intense focus on God’s written Word no matter what they are experiencing:

POINT #1 – We are to crave God’s Word as a newborn babe craves milk. **2:2a**

The main verb of the section is found in **verse 2** - “long for” the pure milk. This verb is an imperative, which means it is a command. It is the only imperative Peter uses in chapter 2. He uses two imperatives in chapter one (1:13, 22); three in chapter four (4:13, 15, 16); four in chapter five (5:2, 8, 9, 12) and thirteen in 2:11-4:10 for a total of twenty-three in the Epistle. By virtue of the fact that this is the only command, it shows us the importance of the craving.

The command is to have an intense craving or intense desire for God’s Word in the same way a newborn or recently born baby has a craving for milk. For a baby, milk is not an option or luxury of growth and survival, it is a necessity.

This is exactly the point Peter is making. When believers are struggling and hurting and suffering, what they need to do is to crave the Word of God, not stay home and stay away from church. They need to have an intense desire for God’s Word because they know this will be their key to survival.

Now the newborn babe eventually grows away from their craving for milk, but we are to never grow away from our craving for God’s Word. We are to always stay in this craving state of desiring to understand God’s Word.

POINT #2 – We are to crave God’s Word because this is what will cause us to grow. **2:2b**

The goal of the Word of God is to have us grow up. We have been born again so we might grow up into our salvation. In other words, God has saved us and wants us to grow and the process that will actually cause this to happen is an intense focus on the Word of God.

The verb “you may grow” is a passive subjunctive. The subjunctive mood means one may or may not grow. What I understand this to mean is that God will not cause growth to occur until one is craving the true, pure Word.

The contingency factor of growth is to crave an accurate understanding of God’s Word. As a believer keeps his or her intense focus on understanding God’s Word, God grants growth. Stay home from a church that will carefully teach you God’s Word and you won’t grow.

It is possible, in fact, it is the expectation of God that the believer will continue to grow no matter what one is experiencing, but this growth will only occur as one craves the Word of God.

Dr. John Stott said once you get the taste for the uncontaminated, pure Word of God, it is addictive (*The Message of I Peter*, p. 80). Many advertisers want you addicted to their products and will spend millions of dollars if they think they have the chance to get you. From various drinks, to various foods, to various vehicles, they want you hooked. God wants us hooked on His Word. He wants us addicted to Scripture because that enables Him to grant our growth.

One of the great examples of this was the Apostle Paul, who locked in a dungeon in Rome in miserable conditions without even his coat, still wanted the books and parchments so he could study. What Paul wanted to do was to carefully study the Word of God because he could grow even while locked in prison.

POINT #3 – We are to crave God’s Word because we have tasted the kindness of God. **2:3**

Psalm 34:8 says, “O taste and see that the LORD is good.” Peter says, you have already tasted that the Lord is good.

The “if” clause is first class conditional, meaning believers have all tasted the grace and kindness of God. **This is not an invitation to taste, it is an invitation to pursue the Word of God because you have already tasted. Notice carefully you get to meet the Lord in the Word.**

The Greek word “kindness” (χρηστος) is one that refers to the good, pleasant and gracious things God has permitted us to taste in our life. It refers to all of the kind and good favor that God shows to believers (*Mounce’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old & New Testament Words*, p. 378).

God allows believers to experience all kinds of good things. In fact, every good thing comes from above (James 1:17). Certainly in view of the fact that God has given us so many good things, our desire should be to know Him through His Word.

POINT #4 – We are to crave God’s Word by putting certain things away from us. **2:1**

The verb “putting aside” (αποτιθημι) is one that means to put off something from oneself such as a garment (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 55). The word is literally used this way in Acts 7:58. When one takes off a garment, he gets it off his body and puts it aside. That is exactly the word used here. The aorist tense refers to specific moments of time when these old things show up. Peter assumes these things will show up.

Now if you look down through the list of things that we are to put off as we have this intense focus on God’s Word, you will notice that the list of things is not actually a bunch of gross sins or vices or sins of paganism. **Most of the words in the list have to do with our attitude and our words.**

When outside pressure hits God's people they can begin to develop poor attitudes toward their brothers and sisters in Christ and can begin to say things that certainly could not be classified as standing firm in the grace of God. Dr. I. Howard Marshall said all of the things mentioned here are love-spoiling vices of which we must get rid of (*I Peter*, p. 62). All are things that clothed our old nature, and none of these things reflect God or Grace.

Peter names five specific negative attributes to put off or get rid of:

Negative Attribute #1 - Get rid of all malice . **2:1a**

The word "malice" (κακια) is one that has to do with bad, wicked, depraved things (Ibid., p. 227). It is a word that actually has its desire to harm another person. This particular word is used in contexts which destroy fellowship and relationships (Romans 1:28-29; Titus 3:3). There is nothing that will wreck fellowship with God's people quicker than when you are involved in depraved things. Those things will destroy your ability to grow in the Word and they will destroy your relationship and fellowship with other believers. Get rid of all depraved things that are bad.

Negative Attribute #2 - Get rid of all guile . **2:1b**

The word "guile" (δολος) is one that means to be so deceitfully crafty that you try to bait and set a snare to trap something (Ibid., p. 120). This is a deliberate attempt to mislead people by lying to them. This word presents the idea of speaking to people with ulterior motives which are not honest and sincere. Get rid of all of this kind of stuff. Be a person who is for real, not one who operates with some hidden agenda.

Negative Attribute #3 - Get rid of hypocrisy . **2:1c**

A hypocrite (υποκρισις) is a pretender, a play actor. The word specifically has to do with speech and answers (Ibid., p. 461). A hypocrite is one who will talk nice to your face and tell you what he thinks you want to hear, but will rip you to shreds behind your back. Hypocrites are verbal play actors in doctrine and practice. They are deceptive and they are dangerous. We need to be truth setters, not verbal play actors.

Negative Attribute #4 - Get rid of envy . **2:1d**

The word envy (φθονος) seems to mean in various contexts, including this one, to want something that someone else has and as a result you verbally attack that person in a hateful way (Titus 3:3). The word is a plural noun, which means it manifests itself many times and many ways. It is possible to spend your entire existence envious of other people and you will miss growing deep in your knowledge of the Word of God.

When one believer is having problems, it is easy to become envious of another believer not having the same problem. For example, if one believer loses his job, he/she can begin to be envious of another believer who has not lost his job and has a good job. If one believer gets sick, he/she can begin to be envious of another believer who isn't sick. Envy will cause you to verbally rip people to shreds and that will hinder your own growth.

As believers we need to get rid of the envy and thank God that the other person isn't experiencing the same things we are, and as a result we will grow deep in the things of God and become a powerful reflection of the grace of God.

Negative Attribute #5 - Get rid of all slander. **2:1e**

The word "slander" (καταλαλιας) means to speak evil of someone in the sense of putting them down. To verbally run them down or talk them down (Ibid., p. 235). The plural noun refers to multiple times. The emphasis of this word is "evil speaking" particularly in conversation (λαλια). The idea is that one chats with others and just weaves into the conversation information that puts another person down (κατα). There are some people who seem to be interested in verbally running other people down with their speech. What they don't realize is they are running their own spirituality down and their ability to grasp God's Word.

What Peter is communicating here is that there is nothing that destroys our ability to grow deep in our understanding of God's Word and in our reflection of God's grace like our speech.

We need to get rid of any verbal assaults that are designed to run people down. These things will devastate a church.

We need to be very careful as to what we say to one another, especially when we find ourselves under attack.

Now what is it that will clean us up in these areas? We have a depraved nature that is driven to envy, hypocrisy, slander and guile. The thing that will clean us up is the Word of God. The more you crave God's Word, the cleaner you will become and the more you will grow.

We all have the potential of growing no matter what we are experiencing in life. This growth will come through an intense passion to know God's Word. In order for that to happen, we must clean up our speech. As we do this, God will grant us a great growth in His amazing grace.