

“Imperishable Love from an Imperishable Life”

1 Peter 1:22—2:3

October 13, 2019

I believe it is helpful to understand the flow of thought throughout chapter 1, so let's review where we have been so far.

Peter is writing this letter to believers who are facing intense persecution under Nero who is the emperor of Rome. By divine providence this letter was written just before the most severe waves persecution, so it functions as a guide to shepherd the church through very difficult times when many would lose their lives to crucifixion and be burned as human torches.

Peter begins by reminding believers of their true identity (vs. 1-2). They are God's chosen people—chosen by the foreknowledge of God the Father who set His love on them from eternity past, chosen by the sanctifying work of the Spirit who set them apart as God's own beloved children, and chosen to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood. That is, to be cleansed by the blood of Christ by turning from their sinful rebellion and coming back under the authority of God by submitting to the loving authority of Jesus Christ.

Then (vs. 3) Peter reminds them that as God's children, as His chosen beloved, they have been reborn into a living hope through the risen Christ and have the guarantee that one day they will receive an eternal, imperishable inheritance which is reserved in heaven, and until that day when their salvation is fully accomplished, they are being protected by the power of God through faith.

And so Peter calls them to rejoice, even though they are suffering the loss of their earthly assets and comforts because their future, heavenly inheritance cannot be taken away—their eternal future is secure in Christ.

In the meantime, while they suffer many trials, Peter reminds them that their suffering is not with divine purpose. God is using their trials to prove the genuineness of their faith. Through the fire, God is strengthening the

very faith by which He protects and keeps their souls until the final day of salvation.

All of this leads up to Peter's first command (13): Fix your hope completely on that future day of salvation when Christ returns—a salvation that was anticipated by the prophets in the OT, a salvation that has yet to be fully perfected when Christ returns, a salvation that has a direct bearing on how we live today. Nick beautifully captured the flow of thought in the middle of chapter one this way: “What we received yesterday determines our hope for tomorrow [and] our hope for tomorrow determines” how we live today.

Let me restate the concept this way: Because we *have been* saved from sin's penalty of death, we *will be* saved from sin's presence when Christ returns. Therefore we are to presently live as though we *are being* saved from sin's power, rejecting our former manner of living according to the lusts of our flesh, and embracing a new distinctive manner of life according to our new nature in Christ.

Let me restate it yet again with the language of 1 Peter 1: Because we *have been* born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, we have the sure hope that we *will* receive our eternal inheritance when Christ returns. Therefore, we can presently live as distinctive children of God.

This distinctive manner in which we are to live as God's beloved children in the present is twofold. *First, we are to live as holy unto the Lord. [14-17]* We are to live holy lives in the fear of the Lord because we are now the children of a holy God. Remember, Peter is writing to believers who are suffering because of their faith. And he's urging them to stay true to their calling to live holy lives. Our human tendency when we are suffering is to excuse ourselves from careful obedience. Yet Peter reminds us not to forsake the Spirit's sanctifying work in our lives through the crucible of fire. Be who you are as children of God. Live out your new nature in Christ regardless of your circumstances.

Earlier this year, one of the guys at ironmen expressed a difficult situation for which he needed prayer. And after we discussed it for a moment, he

summed it up by saying, “God has entrusted this situation to me to handle in the right way.” Yes! That’s it! Living so as to please the Lord when we are in a pressured situation is the very means of our witness for it demonstrates the new nature we have in Christ.

...knowing not redeemed with perishable but with unblemished blood

The second way we are to live distinctive lives *is with love toward one another*. This brings us to today’s text. [vs. 22—2:3]

Before we dig in to our new passage, here’s the big picture recap: Because of the salvation that God has already granted to you, fix your hope completely on the future day when He will yet perfect your salvation and in the meantime, live out your new life as holy unto the Lord and love toward one another with a growth that comes from God’s word.

Let’s unpack [vs. 22]. In the context of 1 Peter 1, I take the word *truth* to refer to the gospel. So the phrase “obedience to the truth” then is equivalent to believing in the gospel (cf. 1:21). That’s what brings about a purified soul. When we respond in obedience to the gospel by forsaking our sinful rebellion to come under the Lordship of Jesus Christ, we are cleansed by His blood. Our souls are purified. So Peter is saying, since your soul has been purified through faith in the gospel (trusting in Christ’s death and resurrection), the result is that you are able to love one another sincerely, so do it!

The underlying principle is this: ***Pure love comes from pure hearts that have been purified by submissive trust in Christ.*** And since this is who you are, live it out! Fervently/intently love one another from the heart.

Notice Peter says a purified soul results in sincere love. Insincere love indicates that while I treat you in a loving way, there is still some selfish motive involved (I’m serving you really in the hope that it will serve me in the end). But when our hearts are purified, we become selfless and therefore sincere in our love, truly seeking the other person’s good, void of a self-serving motive. This is actually possible for Christians. And so Peter says, fervently love one another from the heart. That is passionately care for one another. Spend yourself seeking the other’s good.

Remember, this is Peter’s exhortation to those who are suffering. In your suffering, serve one another. Our human tendency when we suffer is to become self-concerned (“I just need to take care of myself right now”). But Peter is calling them to live out their new nature. A God-like nature of love.

Why? Vs. 23: “*For you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God.*”

Peter’s answer is that you have been born again to a new nature and that new nature is expressed through love.

But what is the connection between love and the enduring quality or imperishable nature of God’s word which saves us. It’s important here to grasp the metaphor that is being used. The seed determines the nature of what is born from the seed. The seed by which God begets life for His children is the word of God. And because the seed of the word is imperishable so the new nature of the one born through the seed of the word is also imperishable. Yet what does this have to do with the command to love one another? Our new imperishable life is expressed through imperishable love. Or we might say, the incorruptible nature of our new life is Christ is expressed through incorruptible love. So I think Peter is saying, stop living according to your corrupted, loveless nature. Honor God as holy and fervently love one another sincerely.

By the way, liberalism in the church today only wants to issue a call to “love” but they have forsaken the call to holiness. If we only emphasize love (according to the world’s definition), it will lead to permissiveness. If we only emphasize holiness it will lead to judgmentalism. But the church needs to pursue both holiness and love.

A fear of perishing will bring with it the temptation to compromised living (compromised obedience to God and compromised love for others). For example, if you faced the real danger of crucifixion, you would probably be tempted to compromise your loyalty to God and His people. But confidence in an imperishable future leads to bold living. In other words, if a believer knows that His eternal inheritance is imperishable, he can take the bold risk of obeying God and loving others even if it costs him everything on earth.

Now in vs. 24 Peter quotes Isa 40: [vs. 24-25a]... “and this is the word that was preached to you!”—this is the word in which you believed. This is the word through which you were born into an imperishable hope.

Let me remind you of the context of Isa 40. God’s people are exiled under the strong arm of Babylon, yet Isaiah reminds them that Babylon will only last for a day. Like grass, her strength will wither, but God’s promises will endure. With the same words Peter encourages a new generation of exiles to whom it must have seemed that the power and glory of the Roman empire was insurmountable and permanent, but Peter reminds them that while Rome’s glory will fade, and her strength wither, the word of the Lord will endure forever—the very word of the gospel that was preached to them. The very word of the gospel they had believed and the very word through which they had been reborn to an imperishable hope.

And so Peter calls them and us to live according to our new imperishable nature as reborn children of God in **[2:1]**. He urges us to rid our lives of the corruptible rot of our loveless, corruptible sin nature which spoils genuine love.

- **Malice** is evil intent, wanting harm for another (Greek: for general for sin or wickedness); love seeks the good of others
- **Deceit** is dishonesty; love is honest
- **Hypocrisy** is ingenuine; love is sincere
- **Envy** is jealously desiring what someone else has; love rejoices in another’s blessing
- **Slander** is defaming another’s character; love holds the reputations of others with great care

Because malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander all represent the rot of the old sin nature, we are to resist their enticement by intensely craving the pure milk of the word. Here (vs. 2) Peter picks up the analogy of a nursing infant. What’s amazing about a nursing baby is that it receives everything it needs for life and growth (as well as comfort) in that milk. The baby intensely craves its mothers’ milk not just because it’s needed, not just because it is sufficient, but also because it satisfies. In the same way, we are to crave the milk of the word.

Peter is saying that the way we grow up in a manner that is consistent with our new reborn life, is by being nourished on the truth and wisdom of God’s word. In fact, Peter issues it as a command: Crave the pure milk of the word!

The milk of the word is what strengthens us to resist the old cravings of our flesh that lead to malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander. The milk of the word is what strengthens us to do what is right and pleasing to the Lord—to live holy lives—when the pressure is on. The milk of the word is what strengthens us to love one another from the heart against our natural tendency to love self especially when we suffer. The church cannot afford to be sick and weak internally with sin and conflict. The church must be pure and strong internally so that it can withstand the external pressure of the world. (strength comes from purity in metal, wood, etc.)

Now don’t miss this. It is the seed of the word that begets life. It is the milk of the word that sustains and grows that life. In human biology, you need the father’s seed to beget life and you need the mother’s nutrients to sustain and grow life. But regarding spiritual life, the word of God both gives and sustains spiritual life. So crave, crave, crave the milk of the word... *“if, you have tasted the kindness of the Lord.”*

This last phrase in 2:3 seems to invoke Psalm 34 where we are encouraged to “taste and see that the Lord is good.” Both Peter and the Psalmist concur that those who fear the Lord can have confident hope in God in the midst of their troubles. The Psalmist urges us to taste. Peter urges those who have tasted to crave. You will not crave that which you have not truly tasted.

Peter doesn’t say know the kindness of the Lord. He doesn’t say understand the kindness of the Lord. He says taste it—personally experience the kindness of God, the mercy of God that gives you new life and new desires to please the Lord and love others, new life that trust and hopes in the face of suffering. You don’t taste by merely going to church or merely hearing the word. You taste by ingesting God’s word. By believing, by trusting, by hoping in God when adverse circumstances assail you. The tasting is experiencing the sufficiency and faithfulness of God to His word as you hope in Him.

Perhaps we can summarize 1:22—2:3 this way:

Because we have been born again through the imperishable seed of the gospel, we should demonstrate an imperishable love for one another that is nourished by God's word.

Let's conclude by stepping back and seeing the big picture that Peter is painting for us. When you suffer as Christian, you must ***plant your feet securely on the unshakeable foundation of the gospel***—what God has already done for you in Christ: new birth, living hope, imperishable life, eternal inheritance—that's your truth-base. Then, ***fix your eyes on the promised hope that Christ is coming again to rescue you from this world of sin***. Refuse to run to any worldly comforts. Rivet your eyes on your future hope.

Then, as you stand on what God has already done through the gospel and fix your eyes on your eternal hope, put your gospel-faith into action with bold living in 3 ways:

1. ***Live as holy unto the Lord***. Do what you know is pleasing to God according to the Scriptures even if its costly.
2. ***Fervently love one another from the heart*** in the spirit of Christ.
3. ***Shepherd your heart to crave the pure milk of the word*** so as to grow in a manner consistent with your new-born life in Christ.