# 1 Peter 2:1-3 Are You Growing? December 13, 2009

# Introduction

We learned in the previous two messages that Peter gives us two reasons for exercising Christian love toward one another. The first was that we purified our souls by obeying the truth—and the goal of such purification is for us to love our Christian siblings. The second reason for us to love one another is that we were born again. Both of these truths—regeneration and cleansing—new life and forgiveness—should drive us to have love not only for God (1 John 4:19) but also for our fellow believers (1 John 4:7).

The new life of the Christian comes from the word of the gospel. This word is imperishable, living, and abiding. It endures forever because it comes from God—and whatever God promises, that promise stands forever on His reputation of truthfulness and faithfulness. That gospel word is pictured as a seed which is planted in receptive soil and then germinates and begins to grow.

Naturally, the desire from that point would be continued growth to maturity, and that is what Peter writes about in the three verses following 1:25. A chapter boundary intervenes, but that doesn’t break Peter’s train of thought. Peter changes imagery in chapter 2 from seeds to babies, but he continues the same thought pattern. Namely, he teaches us that **spiritual growth happens by the same means as spiritual birth**—through the word of the gospel.

So, this message is all about spiritual growth, i.e., becoming more mature in our life as Christians.

# 1. Be Born For the Possibility of Growth, v. 3

“If indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious.”

“Tasted” is a picturesque term. It means just what it says—like tasting food. It means to partake of, to eat, to enjoy, and more on the figurative side, to come to know or experience (Acts 10:10, Mark 9:1, Heb. 2:9).

What you need to experience is that the Lord is gracious. This literally means that He is kind, good, loving, or benevolent. God is always good, even though we don’t always perceive that very clearly. His **goodness** (same word) leads us to repentance (Romans 2:4). God is **kind** to ungrateful and evil people, His enemies (Luke 6:35). We ought to likewise be **kind** and compassionate to one another (Eph. 4:32).

Tasting that kindness means you have a personal experience with it. And that is the same as saying “if you have been saved.” Believers have experienced God’s goodness—which he lavishes on us who were sinners without any merit in us to deserve it. God’s goodness is why we can be saved—why He sent Jesus to die for our sins and why He promised that if we believe in Christ He will give us eternal life. He did not have to do that!

The “if” here is not necessarily designed to engender any doubts, but it does serve some useful purposes. **First**, it lays the foundation for what Peter is saying. What he wrote in the previous verses (which we’ll look at in a minute) will not make any sense unless the reader has experienced salvation.

**Second**, the “if” is in a form that assumes the truth of the “if” for the sake of the argument. It doesn’t say for sure “since you have tasted” or “now that you have tasted.” It leaves that unspecified to encourage you to check up on yourself, and really bring you into dynamic contact with what Peter is saying. Writing it as “since” might let you gloss over an important condition; writing it as “if” really gets you involved. “Yes, I have tasted God’s graciousness!” “Hmmm. Not sure if I have really tasted the Lord’s graciousness.” Think about it!

# 2. Remove Hindrances to Growth, v. 1

“Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking.”

The custom of foot binding was practiced in China for about 1000 years. In it, young girls’ feet were compressed to make them smaller and differently shaped, a trait that was seen to be attractive, particularly for the upper class. The growth of the girl’s feet was thus stunted. The pressure and bandages and all that went with this custom (now outlawed) are like the effect of sin working against proper Christian growth. So Peter tells us to remove these hindrances so that growth can be maximized.

The word for “laying aside” should be thought of not as a mild word, but as a strong “putting off” or “getting rid of.” It is used to speak of putting off the works of darkness (Rom 13:12) or any hindrance that might slow us down in the Christian life (Heb. 12:1). Jesus uses even stronger imagery—if your hand offends you, cut it off (Matt. 5:30).

What are we to get rid of? Here’s the list:

A. Malice – wickedness, depravity, ill will (Despise anyone?)

B. Deceit – guile, cunning, treachery (Double life? Lying?)

C. Hypocrisy – pretense, outward show (Double standard? Two lives?)

D. Envy – jealousy (Want what others have? Never satisfied?)

E. Evil speech – bad talk, slander, defamation (Bad words, jokes? Gossip?)

Note a couple of things about these sins. **First**, we are to remove “all” of them. The word “all” is used three times, on the first two items and the last, and is understood to apply to the rest of them as well. Leave no stone unturned—leave no sin unconfessed and leave no sin alone. Fight against it. **Second**, there is no way that you can wiggle out of applying this to yourself. I know you too well to buy the idea that you do not have any issues with these sins. Everyone does! We need to take a good, hard look at our conduct and see where these things need to be eradicated. When we are working to get rid of these things, then growth can really occur.

# 3. Desire Nutrition for Growth, v. 2a

“As newborn infants, desire the pure milk of the word.”

The word for “infant” is the word for a baby either before or after it is born (here, obviously it is pictured as just being born). It is interesting that in Luke 1:41, the same word is used for the unborn John the Baptist at the end of the second trimester. Luke 2:12 uses the same word to describe Jesus wrapped in swaddling cloths. A baby is a baby, no matter whether it is inside mom or outside!

Who among us does not understand the natural desire of a newborn baby for his mother’s milk or the bottle? If you have had children, then you know this all the better, how baby wants milk every few hours, sometimes more. How he will not sleep for long stretches unless his stomach is full. How he will eat even more in his growth spurts. He will cry and make a fuss unless he gets it. And if he doesn’t have it, to that extent he will be malnourished. What else is there for the little one to live on? Nothing! He needs milk.

In the same way, the Christian needs the word of God. So Peter calls it the pure milk of the word. It has no bad things in it (like the list of sins above). The word for “pure” is the opposite of “deceit” used in verse 1. It is totally pure, like the milk you want your little one to have. It has nothing wrong with it.

This “milk” does not mean “the easy things” of the Bible as opposed to “the advanced things.” Paul uses “milk” in that pejorative sense (1 Cor. 3:2, Hebrews 5:12-13). Peter is uses the term neutrally, referring to the nourishing qualities of the word of God.

We have to note several things about this notion of the milk. **First**, we are to be like newborn infants with respect to it. That means we are dependent on it. We need it. Don’t think you don’t need it, dear believer. You need it desperately, more than you know.

**Second**, we are commanded to desire the word. This means to long for it, to crave it, to yearn for it. It is such that you cannot be satisfied unless you have it. Perhaps you are satisfied without much of it? If so, something is dreadfully wrong.

**Third**, real desire for the word of God is a mark of a genuine believer. When you see people wanting to learn the Bible, wanting to hear preaching, wanting to read it and study it and memorize it and think about it, then you know God is at work in those people. They are like the wise person of Psalm 1. They are like the Psalmist in 19:7-11 and 119:16. They are like the prophet Jeremiah (15:16).

# 4. Natural Nature of Growth, v. 2b

“That you may grow thereby.”

The wonderful thing about the word of God is that when it is your nourishment, you *will* grow. Let me put it negatively first. When I see someone that is having problems in their life, wrong priorities, anger, lusts, sins of other sorts, I can almost guarantee that they need to have more meaningful interaction with the word of God. Many times, they have little to no exposure to the word other than an hour in church on Sunday, if that.

Also, I don’t want you to think of the Bible as magical “miracle grow” if you just read rotely you will grow in Christ. There must be active participation and obedience that happens with the reading. The Spirit of God must work through the word. You must be a true believer to have the ability to really grasp the Scripture.

But given those preconditions, there is a sense in which it will be natural for the believer to grow, just like it is natural for the baby to grow with milk or a tree to grow with sun and water. Such growth is not forced or unnatural at all. The normal Christian life is one of growth, all the time, into the likeness of Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:29).

# Conclusion

We understand that this truth regarding the word of the gospel applies to the entirety of the word of God, our whole 66-book Bible. In fact, it gives us an inkling that we cannot simply limit the “word” to the initial message of the gospel. The word is bigger than that—it is the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27).

No surprises here dear friends. I’m a Bible church pastor. I’m pushing you to get into the Book! What should you expect me to do? But it is not just my hope for you – it is God’s command that you desire the Word of God and to get rid of any hindrances to growth. Growth will follow naturally then. That’s my prayer for you—and Peter’s too (2 Peter 3:18).

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