

CRAVE PURE SPIRITUAL MILK

1 Peter 1:13-2:3

Key Verse: 2:2

“Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation....”

In the previous passage we learned that in his great mercy, God has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Peter refers to this with the word “salvation” in 1:5,9,10, and 2:2. “Salvation” is not only new birth, it is an ongoing process that culminates when Jesus comes again. So 2:2 says, **“grow up in your salvation.”** Once we have received new birth, we need to grow. Growth takes time. As a child cannot grow into an adult all of a sudden, so we cannot become mature all at once. We need to grow step by step in every respect: physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. In this passage Peter exhorts believers to grow to maturity and become influential. As Christians we need to take this exhortation seriously. When we fail to mature, we are not equipped to deal with practical life issues. When problems arise, we tend to blame others instead of examining ourselves. In many cases, our lack of maturity is the problem. This is why many marriages are not as happy as they could be. It is why many parents have lost intimacy with their children. In hindsight, we realize that if we were mature, we could have dealt with the problem with God’s wisdom and glorified God and blessed others. Yet due to our immaturity, we made matters worse. This is why we need to grow to maturity. Let’s learn in what respect we should grow and how we can grow.

First, grow in godly character (13-16). Verse 13a says, **“Therefore, with minds that are alert and fully sober....”** **“Therefore”** reminds us that we have received God’s salvation. In light of this, how should we live? We should set our hope on the grace Jesus will give us when he comes again (13b). This hope should always be burning in our hearts. For this reason, our minds should be alert and fully sober. “Sober” literally means not under the influence of alcohol or some substance. More broadly, it can include lusts for power, sex or money. If we are under the influence, everything is blurry and we easily make bad decisions (Pr. 23:33). We lose discernment and become careless, self-indulgent and complacent. Our life of mission becomes a burden. This is why it is so important to set our hope on the grace to be given when Jesus comes again. So Jesus said, **“Be careful, or your hearts will be**

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weighed down with carousing, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you suddenly like a trap...Be on guard! Be alert! You don't know when that time will come" (Lk 21:34; Mk 13:33).

When our hope is set on Jesus' coming again, it has a tremendous impact on our lives. In verse 14a, Peter calls us **"obedient children."** Before receiving new birth we lived according to our evil desires. We were rebellious and disobedient. But through new birth we became children of God who know his love and saving grace. Now we can be obedient to our Father God. And as children resemble their fathers, so we begin to resemble our Father God. This gives us joy and strength to continue in our love relationship with God. In verses 14b-16, Peter gives practical instructions for God's children: **"do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: Be holy, because I am holy."** When we received new birth, the seed of God's holiness was planted in our hearts and began to grow. At that time conflict arose with the sinful desires already in our hearts. How should we handle this conflict? If we gratify sinful desires, they grow stronger and holy desires diminish. But if we pursue holy desires, they grow stronger and sinful desires diminish. So we should not conform to evil desires, but pursue holiness positively in all we do. What does it mean to **"be holy"**? Sometimes these words sound scary, even to Mother Barry. Often the first thing that comes to mind is someone who carries their Bible everywhere and acts very serious. The meaning of **"holy"** is "set apart." But this does not mean to become like the Pharisees. It means to come out of the corruption of the world and to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and to desire to be like him (Dt 6:4-5). When God redeemed the people of Israel, he did not want them to live according to the pattern they had learned in Egypt, nor that of the Canaanites, but to learn a new lifestyle that reflected his character and holiness (Lev 18:1-5). Likewise, God wants us to come out of the corruption of the world caused by evil desires and to participate in his divine nature (2 Pe 1:4). Our standard of morality, ethics and spirituality is now very high; it is God himself. When God created mankind, he made us in his own image in order to have fellowship with him. But since the Fall, we lost the image of God and became perverted. Romans 1:18-32 explain how this happened and what the result is. People have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They even invent ways of doing evil. This is not a theory; it is the reality we live in. In his great love, God sent Jesus to save us

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from this perversion and to restore his holy and glorious image in us. This is why we don't live according to the trend of this world like a dead fish floating downstream. Rather, we struggle against the perversion of the world by the power of God like a vibrant, living fish swimming upstream. Of course, sometimes we become tired and drift a bit. But fundamentally, by the help of the Holy Spirit, we resist the evil of the world and grow in godly character. This is not just a personal matter. When Christians grow in holiness we can impact our society as the salt of the earth. Let's accept God's word to "be holy," as he is holy.

Second, live out your time in reverent fear (17-21). In this part, Peter tells of two motivations which encourage us to grow in God's holiness. One is reverent fear (17), and the other is redemptive love (18-21). These two motivations are related to God's nature. God is love, and God is also the Righteous Judge. Verse 17a tells us that we call on a Father who judges each person's work impartially. This means that God does not show favoritism toward his children. Rather, he judges their work objectively based on his righteous standard (2 Cor 5:10). Our time in this world is limited; it is not our permanent home; we are foreigners here. Our ultimate destination is eternity with God. This is why Peter says, **"...live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear."** We should live before God's eyes moment by moment. We are living in the age of the Internet. We have access to trashy websites with just one click of a button. They waste our time, make us petty, tempt us to sin, and hurt our relationships. As Christians, we want to avoid this and also protect our children and Bible students. Some people try to control access to the Internet in various ways. This helps, but can't really solve the problem. We can't watch over our loved ones 24 hours a day. Then how can we help ourselves and them? The fear of God in our hearts can keep us from sinning (Ex 20:20). When we fear God, we can overcome temptation and stay focused on what we should be doing. We can use our time and energy and money wisely and effectively. For example, Old Testament Joseph feared God, overcame temptation, rose to power, and became a great leader for Egypt as well as for God's people.

Another motivation to grow to be godly is God's redemptive love. Verses 18-19 say, **"For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of**

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Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.” Here, “the empty way of life” refers to the meaninglessness of pagan life with its idol worship and immorality. Jeremiah 16:19b says, “Our fathers have inherited lies, even vanity and things wherein there is no profit” (ASV). Theologian Edmund Clowney commented: Human culture preserves the past to structure the present. Every society reveres its fathers, whether they be Confucius or Marx, Jefferson, Darwin or Freud. Peter describes the liberation of Christians from the traditions of the fathers; not simply from a few mistaken ideas that have been hallowed by time, but from the deepest meaning (or lack of meaning) of cultural tradition. Not just a few customs, but a whole lifestyle has been swept away by God’s redemption.¹ The empty way of life was handed down from one generation to the next and became like chains binding people in emptiness and meaninglessness. These chains were so strong that no one could break them. So many people have said, “I hated the lifestyle of my father and vowed never to live like that. But I became just like that.” When I was young, I did not like my father’s habit of being silent during meals. So I vowed never to be like that. But when I became an adult, I became just like that. Many people who have grown up with the pain of divorce have vowed not to repeat their parents’ mistake. Yet they found themselves doing the same thing. It is hard to break the grip of the empty way of life. Silver and gold are powerless to redeem us. But the blood of Jesus breaks the vicious cycle and sets us free. The blood of Jesus washes our sin-stained souls. The blood of Jesus purifies us and enables us to come to God. Jesus’ shedding his blood on the cross was not haphazard. It was God’s plan before the creation of the world. According to this plan, God sent Christ as the Lamb of God, without blemish or defect (19b-20). God paid the redemption price of our sins by shedding the precious blood of Christ. This was a high cost to pay. In this way God demonstrated his redemptive love for us. Then he raised Christ from the dead and glorified him (21). Now through Christ our faith and hope are in God. When we realize the depth of God’s redemptive love for his children, it motivates us to live a godly life.

Third, love one another deeply (1:22-2:3). In these verses Peter changes the focus of his admonition from the individual to the community of believers. He said in verse 22, “**Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another**

¹ Clowney, Edmund, 1988. *The Message of 1 Peter*. Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, pp. 71-72.

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deeply, from the heart.” In the past we could not love others sincerely. We felt love, but it did not go deeper than our emotions; it was not rooted in the truth. While we felt love we loved, but when our feeling changed, our love changed. So people say, “Love is changeable.” But God’s love is everlasting and unchanging. When our hearts are purified by obeying the truth, we can experience God’s sincere love. Then we begin to love others deeply from our hearts. Apostle John said, **“This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters”** (1 Jn 3:16). Then he continued telling how to love practically: **“Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth”** (1 Jn 3:18). This love seeks the benefit of others and is willing to sacrifice for them. In order to love others in this way, we need to really understand them. We need to learn how to serve others according to their need instead of demanding something from them. This kind of love should fill our Christian fellowship. The world we live in is full of hardship and stress. If we criticize and blame each other, we only pile up more stress. Worse than that, God’s name is blasphemed among unbelievers. But when we build up a community of God’s love, it becomes a source of strength. This can be an essential part of Christian witness to the world (Jn 13:35). This is why we must love one another. Let’s love one another deeply from the heart!

In verses 23-25 we find why it is so important for us to love one another deeply. In verse 23 Peter says, **“For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.”** Here Peter emphasizes the imperishable nature of our new birth through God’s word, in contrast to human procreation through perishable seeds. To support this he quotes from Isaiah, **“For, ‘All people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord endures forever.’ And this is the word that was preached to you”** (24-25). People assume that they will live in this world forever. They spend most of their time with family and friends and trying to make their mark on this world. Each nation and each generation also have their own identity and sense of worth and try to prove their significance. They look fantastic for a while. But life in this world ends and all the glory of people, nations and generations disappear. My son Joshua had a dream last week in which a Roman column was falling to the ground. In telling me about it, he said, “Civilizations are all collapsing.” Then I said, “The Bible says that all people are like grass....” And when I prompted

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him, he finished the verse: "...and all their glory is like the flowers of the field. The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord endures forever." Even my youngest son, who is seven years old, knows this truth. All other things will perish and fade away, but the word of the Lord endures forever. The word of God is living and enduring; it is indestructible; it never dies; it is life-giving. We have been born again of an imperishable seed through the word of God. This seed grows in us and as a result we will share eternal life forever. That is why it is so important to learn to love one another. Suppose we hold on to our animosity and hatred and fight each other in heaven forever. How miserable it would be. So it is good to learn to love another beginning now and extending into eternity.

2:1 says, **"Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind."** These words describe elements of our sinful nature which hinder us from growing in God's holiness and love, especially in regards to loving one another. Malice is an evil intention toward someone else. It may not be realized in action, but it eats away at the person who harbors it like a poison. It can be compared to malicious software that spreads corruption throughout the inside of a computer. The computer is destroyed though it may look okay on the outside. In the same way, malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy and slander eat away at the hearts of God's children and make them sick and weak. Slander includes speaking ill of others behind their backs, sending derogatory mass e-mails, posting harmful blogs, sending nasty texts about others and so on. We must get rid of all these things.

More importantly, what must we do positively? Let's read verse 2. **"Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation...."** For newborn babies, a mother's milk is not a fringe benefit, but indispensable for survival. They have a desperate desire for basic nourishment and absolutely need their mother's milk. The World Health Organization recommends breastfeeding exclusively for the first six months of a baby's life. After that, it should be done as a supplement until at least age 2. Breastfeeding offers many benefits, including: a somewhat lowered risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, increased intelligence and cold and flu resistance, and a decreased likelihood of middle ear infections, asthma, eczema, dental problems, autism and obesity. This is because a mother's milk is full of nutrients that help a baby grow healthy and strong. Likewise, the

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word of God is full of spiritual nutrients. The word of God makes us wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. The word of God is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness so that we may be thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Ti 3:15b-17). The word of God is a lamp for our feet and a light for our path (Ps 119:105). It is the joy of our hearts (Ps 119:111). Psalm 19:10-11 say, “They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the honeycomb. By them your servant is warned; in keeping them there is great reward.”

Verse 3 says, “...now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.” “The Lord is good” is a repeated teaching in the Bible. The Lord created us in his own image. The Lord provides the best of everything for us. The Lord always works for the good of those who love him (Ro 8:28). The Lord demonstrated his great love for us by sending his one and only Son Jesus as our Savior (Ro 5:8). When we taste the Lord’s goodness, it delights our souls and creates in us a craving for more of him. Craving is an intense desire for more. It is good to have to this craving and for this craving to grow stronger and stronger within us until we grow up in his holiness and in his love. Then we can love one another deeply from our hearts. Let’s crave the pure spiritual milk this year and grow up in our salvation.