

**“THE LIVING AND ABIDING WORD OF GOD”**

**I. INTRODUCTION**

In last week’s passage, we learned about the inseparable relationship between Christian conversion and holy living. Because of God’s gracious provision of salvation in Jesus Christ, Christians are called to a life of holiness. Those who have been ransomed by the blood of Christ are to be holy, because our God is holy.

Today’s passage continues to explore the relationship between conversion and holiness. In these verses, God tells us that his Word is the source of both the new birth and the new life that Christians are called to live. We are born again through the Word of God. It is a living Word; a life-giving Word. And we also grow in grace through the Word of God. It is an abiding Word; a Word that keeps on nourishing and nurturing us for all our lives. These are the two points that I want us to focus upon in this sermon: (1) God’s Word is the source of the new birth; and (2) God’s Word is the source of Christian growth.

**II. THE WORD OF GOD IS THE SOURCE OF THE NEW BIRTH (1:22-25)**

We begin with the first point: the Word of God is the source of the new birth. Peter says that our souls have been purified by our obedience to the truth. This does not mean that we earn salvation by any act of obedience on our part. Instead, “obedience to the truth”

is Peter's way of describing a right response to the gospel. When a person hears the gospel and responds to it by repenting of his sin and placing his faith in Jesus Christ, he is submitting to the claims of the gospel. Placing your faith in Christ is an obedient response to the call of the gospel. But no one is able to do this in their own strength. As we saw last week in verse 21, Jesus Christ is the one who grants saving faith to his people. We become believers in God "through him." We are made willing and able to obey the call of the gospel because of Christ's power at work within us. Jesus is not only the source of our purification; he is also the source of the faith by which we receive that purification.

Peter says that we have been purified "for a sincere brotherly love." God's purpose in purifying you from your sin is not only for your personal benefit. God has ransomed you from a life of impurity and selfishness so that you might live a life of love. Love is the defining characteristic of a Christian. We demonstrate our love for God by loving other people, and especially by loving our fellow Christians. We have a special relationship with other Christians. They are our spiritual brothers and sisters, because they too have been adopted into God's family. If a person claims to love God but fails to love his brother, then the love of God is not truly in him.

The Scriptures reveal numerous aspects of brotherly love. We are called to love our fellow Christians by seeking to outdo one another in showing honor, always striving to be

the one who loves the most (Rom. 12). We are called to live in peace with each other. We are called to pursue the spiritual edification of other believers. We are called to share with our fellow Christians when they are in need. We are called to be gracious and patient towards those who are weaker in the faith, and to help them grow in grace. We are called to be humble and charitable in our dealings with others, extending forgiveness when we have a complaint against someone, because we cannot claim to have received God's forgiveness if we are unwilling to extend it to others. We are called to love our fellow Christians even though they are sinful, immature, weak, and imperfect. In the words of the Puritan minister Thomas Watson: "You who cannot love another because of his imperfections have never yet seen your own face in the mirror." (*A Godly Man's Picture*, p. 140)

Peter says that love is the purpose for which we were purified. You were purified for a sincere brotherly love. Examine yourself on this point. Ask yourself: Am I loving my fellow Christians earnestly from a pure heart? Am I willing to overlook faults and offenses, or do I allow bitterness and resentment to grow within me? Am I quick to forgive, or do I hold grudges? Am I patient with other people, or am I easily frustrated by them? Do I take initiative to do spiritual and physical good to others, or am I too absorbed in my own interests and concerns? These are important questions. If you are a Christian, then you are called to brotherly love. You were purified for a sincere brotherly love.

The new birth brings about true reformation in our hearts because it is produced by God's imperishable Word. Our experience of the new birth does not end at conversion. It has lasting effects, because the Word that causes us to be born again is a living and abiding Word. Peter cites a passage from the book of Isaiah to lay emphasis upon this truth (Isa. 40:6, 8). The words that Peter quotes come right after a section in which Isaiah prophesied that Israel would be carried off into exile by the Babylonians as judgment for their sin. But right on the heels of that pronouncement of woe, the Lord spoke words of great comfort to his people. He assured them that he would forgive their sin and restore them as his people. And he promised them that, though the grass withers and the flowers fall, his word remains forever. He assured the Israelites that he is always perfectly loyal to his Word, and that his promises will never fade or wither. God's Word always accomplishes what it says. And for this reason, we can be certain that the spiritual life that is created within us by the Word of God will never fade or wither. If you have been born again, then you are being made into a new creature; a person who is being conformed to the image of Jesus Christ.

### **III. THE WORD OF GOD IS THE SOURCE OF CHRISTIAN GROWTH**

**(2:1-3)**

This brings us to the second point of the sermon: the Word of God is the source of Christian growth. In the first three verses of chapter three, we are called to live a life that corresponds with the new birth. Since we have been born of the imperishable Word of God, our lives should bear the fruit of this Word. And this means that we need to put away those things that are contrary to our new life in Christ. As you look at the list of vices in verse 1, you can see that all of these things stand in opposition to brotherly love. Malice is having ill-will towards others. Deceit is relating to others in untruthful ways. Hypocrisy is having an inconsistency between what we say and what we do. Envy is looking at the good things that others have with a jealous eye. And slander is criticizing another person when they are not present. These things are the antithesis of brotherly love. And this is why Christians need to put them off. Do not indulge such things. Do not feed your sin. When these things rear their ugly head, cut them off. Put them to death. You are no longer a slave to sin. Christ has ransomed you.

How can you do this? How can you put off your old sinful ways? By growing up in the salvation into which you have been born. And how can you grow? By doing what mom and dad always told you to do: drink your milk! Take your nourishment from the life-giving Word of God. Peter compares the Word of God to milk in order to emphasize the fact that the Word is our source of spiritual nourishment. A baby needs his mother's milk in order to live and grow. But that milk will not do an infant any good unless he drinks it. The same is true for us with respect to God's Word. The Word will do you no good

unless you drink it in. The way to nourish your soul is to understand and receive God's truth. Crave the Word. Ingest it. Seek to understand its full meaning. Consider the various applications it has for your life. Ask what it is calling you to believe and to do. You need the Word in order to grow up to salvation. When you receive Christ, you are born again. But you cannot remain a spiritual infant forever. You need to grow. And the Bible is your spiritual food. Set yourself to feasting upon it each and every day.

#### **IV. USE**

This passage teaches us that the Bible is God's primary means for gathering his sheep into his fold and that the Bible is God's primary means for feeding and nurturing his sheep in their faith. Do we really believe this? Do we really believe that the Bible is alive with God's power? Do we really believe that preaching is the primary way in which God is building his kingdom? Do we really believe that the way people are born again is by hearing and understanding the Word of God and responding to it with faith? That is what the Bible teaches. Romans 10:17 says, "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ."

And do we really believe that God's Word abides within us and continues to accomplish its purposes? Do we really believe that the Bible is sufficient for our spiritual nourishment? Again, that is what the Bible says. Acts 20:32 says, "And now I commend

you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.” Many contemporary Christians pay lip-service to the power of God’s Word, but when it comes to how they actually live out their faith, they feel that the Bible needs to be hitched up to something else to make it really effective: some kind of method, or style, or program, or experience. The problem with this way of thinking is that it prevents us from doing what is most important. It keeps us from taking time to truly understand the Word and let it serve as our guide for all that we believe and do. The Bible does not need to be hitched up to something else in order to be made effective. It only needs to be received with faith. And when it is, the Holy Spirit uses it as the spiritual milk that causes God’s children to grow up into salvation.

For this reason, the way to discern the working of the Holy Spirit in the life of a church or an individual is not to look for an outward show of enthusiasm or an intense emotional experience. Instead, we discern the presence of the Spirit by looking at a church or individual’s handling of God’s Word. A truly “Spirit-filled” church or “Spirit-filled” person is a Bible-filled church or a Bible-filled person. We need to ask ourselves: Do I desire an ever-deepening understanding of the Bible? Do I long for more and more biblical teaching? Do I take full advantage of the teaching that is available to me? Do I listen to sermons as if a banquet is being set before me? Do I discipline myself to read the Bible, to meditate upon it, to memorize it, and to conform my life to what it says? Those are the kinds of questions to ask if you want to know the extent to which the Spirit

of God is at work in your life. The Spirit of God works through the Word of God. He uses the Bible to bring about the new birth; and he uses the Bible to bring about Christian growth.

## **V. CONCLUSION**

Have you tasted God's Word? Is it sweeter than honey to your lips? If so, then crave it all the more. But if you have not tasted the goodness of the Lord in his Word, or if your appetite for the Word has faded, then I urge you to take to heart the teaching of this passage. Your only source of spiritual life and sustenance is the living and abiding Word of God. It is the Word through which you can be born again, receiving purification from sin and being set free to live a life of love. And it is the Word by which you will grow up into the salvation that God is keeping for his children in heaven. Drink in God's Word, and you will see that he is good.