

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

Volume 28, Number 35

September 2, 2012



Godly Children

Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby: If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious. (1 Peter 2:1-3, KJV 1900)

Despite all that God has done for us, and in us, in and subsequent to the new birth, we live with a resident disposition that strives to lead us away from any attitude or conduct that honors the Lord. Peter didn't assure his readers that, if they were truly born again, they would never consider practicing such sins. He rather confronts the potential and exhorts them (us) to lay such things aside. If these sinful inclinations didn't have some degree of influence in us, there would be no basis for the admonition to lay them aside.

As newborn babes... At times older children become spoiled and self-absorbed, but a newborn child is wholly reliant on his/her parents. The parents learn intuitively to sense when the newborn is hungry. They newborn can't verbalize his/her needs. The babe likely will cry or show unhappiness in some way that the loving parent recognizes. The newborn babe isn't ready for steak; the only food the child can digest is milk. It is likely that the first readers of Peter's letter had been born again for some time. They had at least been born again long enough to embrace the faith and to face intense persecution for their faith. However long they had been born again, Peter exhorts them to keep their desires as focused as a newborn. Often a person who newly embraces the faith will be hungry for more gospel knowledge. Over time the brokenness of sin will cloud the new believer's vision and focus. You might hear that same person who so recently was excited at the goodness of God asking, "Is that all there is? I want more." And Satan is always present to fill that person's appetite with dangerous poisons, not healthy spiritual food. Peter's words speak to this appetite in all of us. We never become so mature in our faith that we do not need the reminder, "*As newborn babes...*" We never grow so strong in the faith as to grow beyond the need to keep our focus on the sincere milk of the word. Only as we digest and keep that sincere milk are we able to "...grow thereby."

"...laying aside..." The idea is to put off, as one might take old, dirty clothes off his body and put on a new clean wardrobe. What hinders us from the single, noble focus of a newborn babe for the "...sincere milk of the word"? Peter names five sinful inclinations. In three of the five (malice, guile, and evil speaking), Peter uses "all." He does not intend to suggest that some hypocrisy or envy is

acceptable. More likely he adds "all" to the attitudes and behaviors that most entice us into sin. Let's examine these sinful traits.

1. **Malice.** Malice refers to entrenched wickedness, likely a habit of the mind rather than an occasional slip. The behavior necessarily conveys an immoral direction. It normally aims at harming its object, never at helping.
2. **Guile.** At its heart, guile is deceptive. A fisherman carefully covers a fish hook with enticing bait to catch a fish. Guile involves an intentional and crafty deception. The fisherman intends to deceive the hungry fish into thinking that the bait is savory food, but, when the fish bites the bait, it is hopelessly hooked by the fisherman's guile.
3. **Hypocrisies.** Hypocrisy often plays on insincere flattery. It is deceptive pretense. If we examine the four gospels, we shall see that Jesus often confronted and rebuked hypocrisy, perhaps more frequently than any other sin. He despised this attitude in people who pretended to be religious. So should we. He compared it with leaven, the "...leaven of the Pharisees." (Luke 12:1)
4. **Envious.** Envy appears in the presence of excellence in some trait that the envious person lacks. Matthew 27:18 indicates that envy was a major factor in the Jews' decision to deliver Jesus to Pilate for crucifixion. It seems similar to jealousy in some ways, but it is more active, and, in that way, more destructive. Simply, it refers to a pain that the envious person feels when in the presence of excellence that he lacks.
5. **Evil speaking.** This term is quite broad. It involves slander, an intentional misrepresentation of something another person says. Scripture uses an interesting analogy for this habit, "Backbiting." Think about it. At its full expression, evil speaking becomes blasphemy. In some twenty-eight years of consistent writings of my beliefs from the Scriptures, I have only once or twice refused permission for someone to

use my writings. Each time I refused involved a person who had demonstrated this intentional habit of misrepresenting and misusing anything that someone said or wrote with which he disagreed. We need to be incredibly careful in discussing differences with others that we always represent them accurately. If you hope to gain someone to your viewpoint, someone who does not presently embrace it, you must convey unquestioned integrity to that person in your attitudes and actions, or your conduct will turn him/her off to you, and to your idea. Don't forget. Peter has commanded us to lay all of these sinful habits aside, not refine them so as to presumably gain an advantage for our ideas at the expense of someone who thinks differently.

Any one of these sinful habits corrupts the mind by making something other than the "sincere milk of the word" the individual's goal. A review of the five sins that Peter names will reveal that self, pride, and ego are common to each trait. The person who uses any of these sinful strategies does so with the design of gaining an advantage over another believer, of "Winning the argument." Winning becomes more important than Biblical truth. Is it any wonder then that Peter commands that we lay all of them aside? Simply stated, no believer is capable of indulging any of these habits and still desiring the "sincere milk of the word" with the singleness of heart that Peter commands.

...that ye may grow thereby. Spiritual growth should never end, though, for the believer who indulges any of these habits it ceases. Scripture commands believers to continually grow in their spiritual maturity as long as they live. All believers do not obey that commandment, and they suffer the profound loss of spiritual blessings by that failure. Some teach that God sovereignly causes every child of God to consistently mature over his/her lifetime, but Scripture does not so teach. When God in His sovereign purpose declares that He shall do certain things in Scripture, He never commands us to do them; He affirms in Scripture that He shall do them. For example, Scripture never commands a person to be born again, because God accomplishes the new birth apart from human assistance. The fact that Scripture consistently commands believers to grow in grace and in knowledge of the truth makes the point; God commands this maturing process, but He does not sovereignly and irresistibly cause it to occur.

But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen. (2 Peter 3:18 KJVP)

If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious. Peter is not questioning that his readers have

tasted that God is gracious. He is rather building his case for the behaviors commanded based on their personal experience of God's gracious disposition toward His beloved family. When we adopt the single and focused attitude of desiring the sincere milk of the word, our gracious Lord always responds with that sincere milk.

Interestingly, the sincerity of this lesson relates to the milk of the word, not to our motives in desiring it. What does that mean? It reminds us that God very sincerely provides that milk to His hungry children who lay aside the tools of destructive carnality and seek it. God is never insincere in any of His promises to His children.

The Geneva Bible footnotes this verse with the following:

The second is, that being newly begotten and born of the new seed of the incorrupt word, drinking and sucking greedily the same word as milk, we should grow more and more in that spiritual life. And he calls it, sincere, not only because it is a most pure thing, but also that we should take heed of them which corrupt it.

a. As it becomes new men.

The comment is insightful. If God so carefully provides His children with "sincere" milk, wise believers will beware of any who corrupt this word and wrest it to teach differently than God intended. (2 Peter 3:16)

If so be... These words seem more reasonably intended to build a logical basis for godly conduct that to question whether the readers of the letter have ever tasted of God's graciousness. On this premise, the meaning would be "Since ye have tasted..." "If" can express doubt, or it can outline a logical sequence or relationship. "If A equals 2 and B equals 3, A plus B equals 5." "If you are going to the mall, may I go with you?"

When Paul exposed the false teachers who said that the resurrection had already occurred, he outlined the clear duty of the believer, based on God's sure foundation that stands securely, even in the presence of false teachers and deceived sheep whose faith has been overthrown, "Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity." (1 Timothy 2:19) In our study passage, Peter leads us to a similar conclusion. Since we have indeed tasted of the Lord's graciousness, we have a moral and spiritual obligation to lay sinful, corrupt attitudes and actions aside, and to desire the sincere milk of the word. David reduced his passion to only one objective. (Psalm 27:4) In the vast complexities of modern living, this truth is so very needful. Far too often believers act as if they are in a circus act, performing as professional jugglers, keeping multiple interests balanced all together. What is necessary in your life to return to this one needful thing, the "...sincere milk of the word"?

Little Zion Primitive Baptist Church
16434 Woodruff
Bellflower, California

Worship service each Sunday
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.
Pastor