

BEHAVIORAL HOLINESS AND THE HOLINESS MANUAL

1 PETER 1:22-2:3

I.

David Wells is a professor at Gordon-Conwell Seminary in Massachusetts. Several years ago he said this about our view of God (*No Place for Truth*, p. 300): **“The loss of the traditional vision of God as holy is now manifested everywhere in the evangelical world. It is the key to understanding why sin and grace have become such empty terms. What depth or meaning... can these terms have except in relation to the holiness of God? Divorced from the holiness of God, sin is merely self-defeating behavior or a breach in etiquette. Divorced from the holiness of God, grace is merely empty rhetoric, pious window dressing for the modern technique by which sinners work out their own salvation. Divorced from the holiness of God, our gospel becomes indistinguishable from any of a host of alternative self-help doctrines. Divorced from the holiness of God, our public morality is reduced to little more than an accumulation of trade-offs between competing private interests. Divorced from the holiness of God, our worship becomes mere entertainment. The holiness of God is the very cornerstone of Christian faith, for it is the foundation of reality. Sin is defiance of God’s holiness, the Cross is the outworking and victory of God’s holiness, and faith is the recognition of God’s holiness. Knowing that God is holy is therefore the key to knowing life as it truly is, knowing Christ as he truly is, knowing why he came, and knowing how life will end.**

**“It is this God, majestic and holy in his being, this God whose love knows no bounds because his holiness knows no limits, who has disappeared from the modern evangelical world.”** May that not be true of us.

In our study of First Peter we have seen that the apostle was writing to Christians living in Asia Minor who were faced with trials. Peter says that in spite of the reality of trials, Christians should pursue holiness. Holiness, we have seen, involves a being set apart to God, a pursuit of moral purity. In one sense, Christians are already holy. For the New Testament calls Christians “saints,” which literally means “holy ones.” But in another sense, sanctification, “being made holy,” is a life-long pursuit that reaches completion only when we get to heaven.

We saw last week from vv. 13-21 that the motivation that Peter says that we should have in pursuing holiness is that Jesus is coming back for us some day. Then, secondly, we should pursue holiness because God has called us to follow Him. He has chosen us individually and drawn us to Himself. Then thirdly we need to realize that we Christians will face a judgment of rewards. We will be rewarded for faithful service. Then fourthly, Peter explained that we have been redeemed. The death of Jesus has delivered us from bondage to sin.

Now Peter is going to describe what holy behavior looks like. How is it that Christians should display holy behavior? First of all, he is going to tell us about what holiness looks like in the way that Christians relate to each other.

I.

Thus in v. 22 of #1 of 1 Peter, which is p. 1014 in the black Bibles, Peter talks about HOLINESS IN BEHAVIOR TOWARD FELLOW CHRISTIANS. (PROJECTOR ON--- I. HOLINESS IN BEHAVIOR...) Peter writes, **“Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart...”**

The first action word to appear in this verse is “having purified.” This is a verb form of the original Greek word for “holy.” A variety of words in our English Bibles are actually forms of this Greek word for “holy.” This includes “saints,” which is literally “holy ones,” “sanctify,” which is “to make holy,” and now “having purified,” which is “having been made holy.”

Peter is writing to Christians. He says that they have acquired souls that are set apart to God by virtue of their obedience to the truth. The truth that he is talking about was described in the previous paragraph. It is the gospel. It is the message that Jesus was both God and man. He died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins. He rose again from the dead. When we trust in this Jesus, we become Christians. God offers this to us as a gift. We can only accept it by faith.

Our responsibility now as saints is to “love one another earnestly from the heart.” Jesus taught this concept to Peter and the other disciples. We saw that in our recent study of John’s Gospel. According to John #13 v. 35 (PROJECTOR ON--- JOHN 13:35) He said, **“By this all people will know that you are My disciples--- how? --- if you have great preaching and teaching? If you have people who know Bible doctrine backward and forward? If you have complete programs for all ages? If you have worship services that are entertaining and cutting edge? No! “By this all people will know that you are My**

**disciples if you have love for one another.”** Jesus himself says that the best apologetic, the best defense, of the Christian message is Christians loving each other.

Three more times in this short letter Peter repeats the command for Christians to love one another. The Gospel of John quotes the command of Jesus to love one another several times. It appears in other places in the New Testament. If God’s Word says something once, it is important. If it says it many times, it is very, very important.

There are at least three distinguishing features of the love that Peter is describing. First, it is an *agape* love. (PROJECTOR OFF) This is the strongest word for “love” in the Greek language of Peter’s day. It is the term that the New Testament uses to describe God’s love for His Son, for the human race, and for Christians. It is a love that involves a commitment of the will. At times in the New Testament it overlaps in meaning with *phileo*, which is the term for brotherly love in the first part of the verse.

Psychiatrist Scott Peck observes, “**...the desire to love is not itself love... Love is an act of will--- namely, both an intention and an action. ...No matter how much we think we are loving, if we are in fact not loving, it is because we have chosen not to love and therefore do not love despite our good intentions.**” Not only does true love require that what is best for another person be the object of our attention, but also that there is some concrete action that demonstrates that love. Biblical love is not just an emotional feeling.

Second, this is an **earnest** love. The Greek word from which “earnestly” comes means literally “to stretch out.” The word was used by the Greeks to describe fishing nets that were laid out to dry. In athletics it was used to describe an athlete who exerted all of his energy in competition.

In Luke 22:44 Christ was in Gethsemane with His disciples contemplating the crucifixion that He was about to face. (PROJECTOR ON--- LUKE 22:44) Luke says, “**And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.**”

The original Greek term was also used in Roman times to describe a man who was crucified. His body was stretched out upon a cross. So the fervency of God’s love for us was demonstrated when Jesus Christ was stretched out upon the cross to pay the penalty for our sins. That is the model of the earnest love that we are to have for one another.

(JOHN 15:13) So it was that Jesus declared in John #15 v. 13, **“Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.”**

We are commanded to love one another earnestly. We are to love the unlovely. We are to endure insults and put-downs and acts of commission and omission and love that is spurned. Fervent love means forgiving fellow Christians who have done us wrong. Fervent love means focusing on the needs of other people and acting according to what is in their best interests. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Then thirdly we are to love one another from the heart. In English we determine the meaning of a sentence largely by word order. In Greek there are little word endings on nouns that determine their function in the sentence. The subject doesn't have to be at the beginning of the sentence. Often the thought that the author wishes to stress is placed first. Here Peter put “from the heart” first. **“From the heart one another love earnestly.”**

It is much easier to love a brother or sister in Christ only from the mind. But when a Christian loves another person from the mind and not the heart, it usually comes out. It comes out in little put-downs, in little criticisms, in gossip, in attitudes, in a hundred little ways. Brethren, we are commanded to love one another earnestly from the heart.

We are capable of loving in this way because we have been given purified souls. We have been made holy by virtue of our trust in Christ. God is now resident in our lives.

Furthermore, Peter says that we Christians have been put into a family. The apostle speaks of a brotherly love. Often the New Testament writers describe fellow Christians as “brothers.” That implies that we are part of a new spiritual family.

One of the primary characteristics of a good family is the unconditional love and acceptance that is found there. You always know that no matter what you do, or don't do, or what happens to you, you will be loved by your parents and your brothers and sisters. There are standards to which we are accountable, but the context of that accountability is an atmosphere of love. Isn't that the atmosphere that we want in our family? Isn't that what we want in our church? Most importantly it is what God wants. **“From the heart love one another earnestly.”**

II.A.

The rest of our passage deals with THE MANUAL OF HOLINESS. (PROJECTOR ON--- II. THE MANUAL OF HOLINESS) It describes the guidebook that explains how holy behavior, including love, works. Verses 23-25 describe ITS ETERNAL NATURE. (II. THE MANUAL... A. ITS ETERNAL NATURE) Verse 23 says, **“...since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God...”**

Peter could be understood here as referring to the Bible. I think more specifically that the seed is the life-changing message of the death and resurrection of Jesus. That message is contained in the written and proclaimed Word of God. It is found in the Bible.

This eternal Word is first described as “living.” It is alive. It changes lives, and it gives life. At the beginning of v. 23 Peter reminds his Christian friends that this Word has caused them to be born again. It has caused them to be reborn spiritually. (HEBREWS 4:12) Hebrews #4 v. 12 says, **“For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword...”**

In the 1930s a missionary named Michael Billester was distributing Bibles in Europe. He visited a small town in Poland and gave a Bible to a villager. (PROJECTOR OFF) This man became a Christian as a result of reading it, and he passed this one Bible on to others. Eventually 200 people became Christians through the influence of that one Bible.

In 1940 Billester returned to that village and held a worship service. Usually he asked for testimonies, but this time he asked if several in the congregation would recite verses of Scripture. One man stood and said, **“Perhaps we have misunderstood. Did you mean verses or chapters?”**

It turned out that 13 of those people had memorized all of Matthew, Luke, and part of Genesis. One person knew all of the Psalms by heart. Others had memorized additional sections of the Bible. To that group of believers God’s word was alive. It was living. In the midst of a country that had recently been occupied by the Germans and Soviets they had discovered its power to sustain and transform their lives. (Crosswalk.com, 12/8/2017, “Devotions for Seniors”)

Peter's readers had also discovered that God's Word was alive, and that it was able to sustain and transform their lives in the face of trials. Many of us have made the same discovery.

Peter calls the Word of God in v. 23 "abiding." It endures. To support that thought the Apostle in v. 24 quotes from the Old Testament prophet Isaiah. Isaiah was describing the situation where the Hebrew people were living in captivity because of the Babylonians. Now the people of God were in exile because of the Romans. Isaiah wrote, **"All flesh is like grass/ and all its glory like the flower of grass./ The grass withers,/ and the flower falls,/ but the Word of the Lord remains forever."** The thought is that investing in God's word and obeying it produces eternal dividends.

In 303 AD the Roman emperor Diocletian began a major campaign to persecute Christians. He ordered his subjects to destroy their Bibles. Many Christians did not, and some were killed because of it. Finally Diocletian erected a pillar on top of a ruined copy of the Bible. Inscribed on the pillar were these words: **"The name of the Christians has been extinguished."** (*Evangelism Is*, Earley and Wheeler, p. 273)

Ten years later, however, the following emperor made Christianity a legal religion in the Roman Empire. Shortly after that, Emperor Constantine declared that the Bible was the infallible Word of God. It did indeed remain.

Two hundred years ago the philosopher Voltaire predicted that the world would no longer hear of the Bible within the following fifty years. He was wrong. One hundred-forty years ago the American skeptic Robert Ingersoll predicted, **"In 25 years the Bible will be a forgotten book."** (*Some Mistakes of Moses*, 1879) He, too, was wrong. The Bible continues to be the best-selling book in the world.

One hundred years ago Vladimir Lenin and the Communists began a campaign to stamp out religion in the Soviet Union. They proceeded to destroy churches and burn Bibles. In the early 1980s the Soviet Union began to open up and Campus Crusade for Christ was allowed into the country to distribute Christian literature, including the Bible. A friend of mine had a leadership role in that effort. He sent me an e-mail some time ago that at one point said this: **"I mentioned that I ran a warehouse in Russia that had a Soviet Cold War bomb shelter where we stored some of the [Christian] literature. But it was too small. Then I mentioned that we looked at a complex of 4 buildings each about the size of a Home Depot. All were filled with millions of books. The piles were crumbling. We walked on 3 feet of books. The floor had caved in in places and books were falling into the basement where there were more books. It was stunning. The books were in various languages. There was only one name on all the books--- Lenin. I was standing in the distribution center of the Communist Party of Russia. In the**

**corner a half dozen Russians were cutting off the back of the books and throwing them into a shredder to sell for toilet paper or newspaper. It was an amazing experience.”** Out of that place my friend Doug proceeded to distribute Bibles and other Christian literature. The Bible remains. Lenin’s works are dead.

B.

Our passage also describes ITS NOURISHING QUALITY. (PROJECTOR ON--- II. A. B. ITS NOURISHING QUALITY) The second part of v. 2 of #2 says this about the Word of God, “... **so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation**”--- that is, that you may grow in this new life that has resulted from your being born again. Peter is talking about spiritual maturity, and he says that God’s Word is essential to that process.

God’s Word is food to the spiritual life of a Christian. Imagine someone going to a doctor and complaining about feeling weak, tired and having no energy. The doctor asks, “Have you been eating well?” “As a matter of fact I only ate once last week. But I don’t see what difference that should make.”

That would sound pretty foolish, wouldn’t it? Yet the only intake of God’s Word that some Christians get is in church on Sunday morning. Peter says that the Word is our spiritual nourishment. A regular intake of this Word is essential to our spiritual health.

Some Christians seem to expect the Word of God to hit them like a jolt of adrenaline each time they read or study it. That can and does happen. But the benefits of reading and studying the Bible are more like the benefit that comes from being on a healthy diet or taking the right vitamins. Peter was convinced that a regular intake of God’s Word is essential to the long term spiritual health of every believer.

C.

The bottom line relates to what we choose to do with this living and abiding and nourishing Word. Thus in vv. 1-3 of #2 we learn about ITS REQUIRED RESPONSE. (II. B. C. ITS REQUIRED RESPONSE) There is both a negative and a positive responsibility that we have. Verse 1 of #2 describes the negative aspect: **“So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander.”**

When extreme stress is placed upon a group of people, as happened to the people to whom Peter was writing, there is danger that the worst will be brought out in them. We have seen that in Venezuela and Puerto Rico and Afghanistan and sometimes on our southern border. It can happen in families, and it can happen in churches. The born again believers whom Peter was addressing were Jews and Gentiles who had previously hated each other. Many of the Gentiles probably had wild backgrounds. Now they were being put under pressure, and they were faced with the temptation to revert to old ways of behaving.

There was danger that they would revert to **malice**, which is evil conduct in general. There was danger that they would revert to **guile**, which involves deceitfulness and manipulation of people. There was danger that they would revert to **hypocrisy**, which is pretending to be more holy than one really is. There was also danger that they would revert to **envy**.

Envy, hypocrisy, deceit, and malice may all lead to **slander**. The Greek word that Peter uses literally means “a speaking against.” Slander involves tearing down a person, attacking his or her character, spreading rumors about that individual. Under pressure, we are especially tempted to slander other people, and we can learn subtle ways of doing that.

We are tempted to use the “but” approach: “He has a tremendous voice, BUT I sure wouldn’t want to be married to him.” “She has a brilliant mind, BUT she sure is a boring Sunday school teacher.”

Then there is the “question motive” approach: “That certainly was a big gift that the McGuilicuttys made to the church. They must be trying to make an impression.” Or we see someone provide an especially knowledgeable answer in a Bible study, and we say, “He’s just trying to impress people with how much he knows.”

Then there’s the “unfavorable comparison” approach: “Their kids are pretty well-behaved, but I would never let mine watch some of the things that they let their kids watch on TV.”

When we are wanting to sound especially spiritual, we use the “prayer request” method of slander: “Mabel, I need you to pray for Louise. She just really lost her temper with me last night, and she has this problem of being so sensitive and touchy.”



All of these methods are subtle forms of slander. Peter says, "If you're going to get into the Word and grow spiritually, put aside slander and all of these other evil practices that lead to it."

In vv. 2 & 3 he stresses the positive response to God's Word: **"Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation--- if--- and it might actually be better translated 'since'--- since you have tasted that the Lord is good."**

There is debate among the experts about the exact meaning of the original word translated here in the ESV as "spiritual." Some of you have a translation of v. 2 that says "milk of the word." The original Greek word is *logikon*. (LOGICON...) It is related to the Greek word *logos*. Some of you are familiar with that word. It is simply translated as "word," though it can have a wider range of meaning. It is the term that is used in John 1:1: **"In the beginning was the Word..."**

The variation of *logos* in v. 2 is used only one other time in the New Testament. Its exact meaning is debated. In Romans 12 v. 1 (ROMANS 12:1) the Apostle Paul writes, **"I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual [or some say, reasonable, or logical] worship."** However we define or translate the word in our verse, the reference appears to be to God's Word.

"Long for," the verb of command in this sentence, is a strong term. It expresses an earnest desire. The object of this desire is "pure," or "unadulterated," milk, which involves God's Word. (PROJECTOR OFF) Peter here is not contrasting the milk of the Word with the meat of the Word as is done in other places in the New Testament. In this instance all of the truths of God's Word are called "milk."

Believers are commanded to long for this pure spiritual milk in the same way that babies long for physical milk. Notice that Peter calls them not just "infants," but "newborn infants." Any of you who have had children, remember the difference. When feeding time comes around and one month old Poopsie decides its time to eat, you might be in the midst of something. So you calmly tell little Poopsie to wait a few minutes until you are done with your project. Poopsie, of course, immediately stops crying and quietly waits for you to finish your project, right?

It doesn't work like that. When baby wants to eat, baby wants to eat. She will not be satisfied until that desire is quenched. Peter says that this is the kind of desire that Christians should have for God's Word. How sad it is that we Christians so often reserve that kind of enthusiasm for Monday night football,

Saturday morning yard sales, the evening news, or a favorite TV program. Do we have that kind of intensity of desire for reading and studying the Bible?

Columbia University in New York City was founded in 1754. (PROJECTOR ON--- COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY SEAL) This was the original seal adopted by the university. It is still found in various forms around the campus. At the top of the seal is the Hebrew word YHWH, the personal name of God who is the source of learning. Inside the circle appear Latin words which mean "In your light we shall see light." Underneath the seated woman is the address of our verses, 1 Peter 2:1-2. It was once the recognition of all American education that every student should long for God's Word. It should at least be a goal for us Christians. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Some desires have to be cultivated before they become a natural part of our lives. When I was in college, I had a good friend who was a cross country runner. He kept after me to try running. He talked about the physical health benefits and the mental health benefits that came from it. So I finally decided to try it. I started out small. But gradually I increased my speed and my distance, and running became part of my life. Forty-five years later I am still doing it. It has become part of my life. It was an interest that had to be cultivated.

You may need to cultivate a similar kind of hunger for God's Word. Perhaps you need a plan. My plan involves reading through the Bible once a year. I also have a strategy for memorizing certain parts of the Bible. I do it not because I am a pastor, but because I am a Christian.

If you want to cultivate a desire for God's Word, you probably need a plan, too. It doesn't have to be the same as my plan. Perhaps you need some kind of daily Bible reading guide. Perhaps you would benefit from an audio Bible CD. Perhaps you need to connect with a small group Bible study. We have several of those around here. Come on Sunday nights. Mac Jaynes is doing a fine job of teaching about Elijah and Elisha.

Peter says that Christians should crave, should long for, should earnestly desire, the pure, spiritual milk, which is the Word of God, so that they can "**grow up into salvation,**" i.e., so that they can mature spiritually. If this desire for God's Word was automatically a lifelong yearning that every person was given when he or she became a Christian, Peter wouldn't have to tell believers to do it. But he was realistic enough to know that Christians need to be exhorted to do it.

Perhaps we don't have more of a longing for God's Word because we haven't laid aside all malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy and slander. Perhaps we just haven't disciplined ourselves to read it. Or perhaps we don't have more of a desire to read the Bible because we have never **"tasted of the kindness of the Lord,"** as Peter phrases it in v. 3. Back in v. 23 of #1 the Apostle described this experience as being "born again."

Jesus Himself said, **"Except a man be born again, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."** A bit later He went on to explain, saying, **"For God so loved the world that He gave His unique Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life."** Our responsibility is to place our trust in the God-man Jesus Christ and His death for our sins. We must recognize that we are by nature and by deed sinners. That sin separates us from the holy God who is there. Jesus Christ became our substitute by dying on the cross in our place to pay the penalty for our sins. Our responsibility is to accept Him as our substitute. We have to put our trust in Him, believing that our ticket to heaven comes from receiving the forgiveness that He offers to us. It is that act of faith that makes us "born again," as Peter describes it.

Peter recognized that in the midst of the battles of life, we need to be firmly rooted in God's Word. An artillery officer in the US Army had a teaching rotation between 1958 and 1960 at the artillery school at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. According to him, the attitude of the students was so lax that he had a problem with the men staying awake in class. Between 1965 and 1967 this officer was again back at Fort Sill teaching at the school. But this time he says that the students, though listening to the same basic lectures that were given years earlier, were alert, taking detailed notes, and asking intelligent questions. What was the difference? These men realized that in less than six weeks they would be in the midst of a bloody conflict in Vietnam.

The Bible says that when we become followers of Jesus, we become active participants in the cosmic struggle between good and evil. In the midst of a conflict that at times can get rough, we need to maintain holy behavior toward fellow Christians. We need to love each other. We need direction in how to do that as well as how to relate to the world around us. That guidance comes from His Word. Do you long for a better understanding of God's truth? **"...like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation--- if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good."**