

Craving Spiritual Milk and Spiritual Growth

1 Peter 2:1-3

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For 20 years the milk industry funded an ad campaign that was very effective in marketing the importance of drinking milk. This included pictures of famous people with a milk smile (see Clint Black below). The assumption behind these is that every normal and healthy human being would want to grow strong. Strong bones. Strong muscles. To get there, you need milk.



How about spiritually? Is the same thing true? Will a normal Christian have a desire to grow? Maybe what we need is a new ad campaign.



Billy Graham



Martin Luther



Gary Butler

To become mature spiritually, you need milk. But how? How do Christians grow? And what does it mean if growing isn't a priority?

1 Peter brings up one of our core values here at Bethel Church. Spiritual growth. Also known as sanctification or discipleship—growing in depth and quality as a disciple.

"So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander. 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." (1 Peter 2:1-3)

Remember that chapter and verse divisions were not part of the original letter. What we call chapter 2 was just the next section for Peter when he wrote. What has he just been talking about? Purity (1:14ff). Loving one another (1:22ff). The Word of God (1:24-25). Authentic Christianity will always prioritize moral purity, loving one another, and obedience to God's Word.

They teach you in preaching classes to make sure you put the cookies on the bottom shelf. Put the truth where everybody can reach it. Peter introduces his cookie shelf teaching with "therefore" or as the ESV translates it, "so." These little conjunctions are important to notice as it tells you of the author's intent. We see that Peter still has in mind relationships and love among brothers and sisters in Christ. In verse 1 he lists five toxins within Christian relationships. These are the opposite of love. They are hate and they tear at the fabric of church and Christian unity.

What are we to do with them? "Put away." Other translations go with "Rid yourselves." The language is used for taking off clothes and setting them aside. What are you saying when you throw clothes in the dirty clothes basket? *I'm done with them. I want to wear clean clothes.* If I may push the analogy, how often do you have to get rid of dirty clothes? Every day. Every night I take off the old. Every morning I put on the new. Spiritually, the same is true. The Christian life is daily dying to my natural sinful attitudes and putting on the attitudes reflecting my new life in Christ. This is how we grow.

Toxins in the Body

Malice

"So put away all malice." (Verse 1) The word is "evil" in general but the context is interpersonal relationships, so translators go with evil toward others. Malice describes that well. Malice is any evil intent toward others. If love gives of itself for the good and joy of others, malice is self-obsession that plots the ruin or damage of others. In this list it is a summary word for the other toxins. Put away ALL malice.

Deceit

Any fisherman here? This word is used to describe a fisherman who dangles a bait in the water. Hiding within the worm or the jig or the surface lure is a painful surprise. Deceit is like fish bait—it says one thing, but it is hiding something sinister. Its purpose is deception or treachery. Deceit is when we are anything less than honest and authentic with others. It's easy to tell others what they want to hear or shade the truth a little for my benefit.

Why is this toxic? Relationships are built on trust. Nothing undermines trust quicker than discovering intentional deceit. Deceit is not making an honest mistake or honestly thinking

one thing and discovering another to be true. Deceit is malice with words. The intentional use of deceitful words either lifts me up or tears others down.

Hypocrisy

We have some metaphors for hypocrisy. To be two-faced. Speak with a forked tongue. This is so common as to not need much explanation. Hypocrisy is play-acting. It is to act one way but to secretly be another.

Jesus often described the Pharisees as hypocrites. Famously in Matthew 23:15 he repeats over and over, "*Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!*" Then he points out how they say one thing but secretly live inconsistently with their public persona.

Hypocrisy is especially a problem in Christianity because we claim to be followers of the most moral person who has ever lived. A recent poll of 20-somethings revealed that 86% of non-Christians perceived Christians as being hypocritical; that is, lacking the love of Jesus in their attitudes and actions. Apparently 20-somethings feel they are in a good place to judge the moral lives of others.

This is the challenge we face. From one perspective, every Christian is a hypocrite because we all fail the name. Christian. Christ-one. I don't think that's the hypocrisy Peter has in mind. It's not sinners-saved-by-grace type hypocrisy, but Christians who claim one thing and live another. This is being sanctimonious. Duplicitous. Acting high and holy, but secretly living another way.

Envy

Envy and jealousy are evil sisters. They look a lot alike. Envy says, *I crave what you have*. Jealousy says, *I crave what you have and I don't want you to have it*. Envy leads to jealousy because the more convinced I am that I will not get what I want, the more I resent the person in my life that has it.

"Envy may be defined to be a spirit of dissatisfaction with, and opposition to, the prosperity and happiness of others as compared with our own. The thing that the envious person is opposed to, and dislikes, is the comparative superiority of the state of honor, or prosperity or happiness that another may enjoy, over that which he possesses." (Jonathan Edwards, *Charity*, p. 112)

Love is the opposite of envy in that love doesn't crave what it doesn't have. Love doesn't obsess over what it doesn't have. Love doesn't find its significance in what it doesn't have. Christian love finds its satisfaction in what it does have in Christ. This is why envy is a kind of apostasy in the church. It denies the value of knowing and having Christ. When Christians are envious, they are saying, *Jesus isn't enough for me*. I need something you have. That resentment of what others have quickly leads to in-fighting and division and disunity. Get rid of it!

Slander

Slander is not speaking to people but about people. Slander can be in front of people or behind their back. If the intent of my words is to tear down the reputation or testimony or standing of my brother, that's slander. Here's the thing: slander can be true. People say, Well it's true, isn't it? The test of slander is not truthfulness, but intent. "*Therefore, having*

put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another.” (Ephesians 4:25)

What is my motivation for what I am saying? Here is a test: if the person I am talking about would hear what I am saying, would it feel like love to them? If not, shut up!

Here’s another test: do I feel the need to whisper this? Proverbs talks about those who whisper—*“A whisperer separates close friends.” (Proverbs 16:28)*

Slander and all these others are toxins in any relationship and church. They are the opposite of love. They ruin relationships. They are part of the old way of life and thinking. Christ has saved us out of this and from this, and in order to grow, we must get rid of them. How?

Feeding the Body for the Purpose of Spiritual Growth

“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.” (1 Peter 2:2-3)

I am so glad that I can preach this after personally seeing my own daughter’s desire for mommy’s milk. And now to see her appetite at work as a one-year-old. Now when her plate is empty she will say in the cutest way, “Moo-oore?” I will say more about this in a moment. First, we have to understand what “milk” Peter is referring to.

“Long for the pure spiritual milk.” (Verse 2) Our first clue is what this milk does. *“That by it you may grow up into salvation.” (Verse 2)* This spiritual milk does for the Christian what mommy’s milk does for the baby. It nourishes us. It provides what we need. It causes us to “grow up.” Into what? *“Into salvation.” (Verse 2)* This is not that we might become saved, but it is seeing salvation like growth into adulthood; growth into maturity. What does that in the Christian life?

When we see this in context, it all points the same direction. Look at the preceding verse, *“But the word of the Lord remains forever. And this word is the good news that was preached to you.” (1 Peter 1:25)* At the least, milk is the gospel of Jesus, but I believe the spiritual milk described is the Word of God; the Bible.

Don’t let “*infants*” here fool you. Peter is writing to a church that includes folks who have been Christians for 30 years. He is not calling them spiritual children. He is illustrating how a Christian grows no matter what stage they are in. While not the only way, the primary means to growth God has given us is the hearing, understanding, and applying God’s Word to our lives. Colossians 3:16 says a similar truth, *“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.”*

This is such a great verse because it casts a Bible-based vision for Christian community. When the Word of God is alive in a community, it is nourishing. It is convicting. It is transforming the individuals in the church and the church as a whole. What happens? They mature and that turns their slandering, deceitful, hypocritical tongues into tongues that speak truth to one another. Their words have the mark of divine wisdom as what they say echoes the word of God in their hearts. This produces signs of joy and gladness like songs and thanksgiving.

Who wouldn’t want to be part of a church like that? Notice that it begins with the Word of Christ dwelling richly. Or, in Peter’s terms, a church of people wanting God’s Word like an infant wants her milk.

Where Does the Craving Come From?

Here is where the illustration of a newborn baby is so helpful and my own experience as a new father brings this alive to me. Twenty-one months ago I became a dad for the first time. Jennifer became a mommy. We were anxious about many things, as most new parents are. One of the uncertainties we had was the whole breastfeeding process. What would it be like? We understood the basics but I am here to tell you, *I didn't begin to understand how it all really worked.*

I'll spare you certain details here, but getting that first feeding to work was a real challenge. The hospital provided a lactation nurse. You would think, *people have been doing this for thousands of years, how hard can it be?* We had a hard time. And don't even ask me about pumps. I honestly don't think I knew they existed or that that sound would be the soundtrack of my life.

You know what was the key? The key was that Kiralee was hungry for milk. All the techniques and coaching and help would do no good at all if our little baby wasn't hungry. During the first year, I witnessed over and over again the power of this illustration. A newborn will not be satisfied with anything other than milk. It doesn't matter what time of day, how inconvenient, how tired we are—that baby wants milk. What does she do when she doesn't get it? WAAHHHHH! How inclined is she to go a day without it? It won't happen. A healthy baby craves regular feeding. In fact, it's very important to get a baby on a regular feeding schedule. What happens when it is hit and miss? Maybe today. Maybe in two weeks? That doesn't work. Healthy babies have healthy appetites and need regular feeding.

"Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk." God put in an infant a craving for milk. A child that has no appetite for milk is in very serious condition. A supposed Christian who has no real desire for God's Word is at best seriously unhealthy. Wherever the gospel has gone in the world there has been an accompanying love and desire to know God through His Word. This is one reason Hebrews says we are not to forsake assembling together. Why are these gatherings so important? There are many reasons, but how about hearing the dinner bell on Sunday morning? Clang! Clang! Clang! *Time to go to church! I'm hungry. I need to be spiritually fed.*

I can hear a quiet murmur. Maybe you are being honest. Crave isn't exactly the word you would use to describe your appetite for Scripture. Perhaps it feels more like a duty. Your listening to a sermon is like an 8-year-old boy eating his peas. Where does this craving desire come from? Look at verse 3: *"If indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good."* Peter quotes Psalm 34:8 here. It reads, *"Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good!"*

This was my epiphany this week on this passage. Why would Peter quote a Psalm about tasting right after a verse about infants and milk? What is the connection? You know it even if you don't realize it. Let's see if this helps (see the top of the next page):



Imagine if you could have a taste of one of these dishes or desserts. The smell hits you first. Amazing. Then you have the experience of bringing it to your mouth. Your taste buds are dancing. Your heart is happy. Then you have the first luscious morsel. It touches your tongue and instantly, happiness floods your body. The texture comes next. The mixture of flavors arrives and they are perfectly balanced. You chew these flavors into a savory bite. You don't want to swallow too quickly. You want to get every molecule of flavor to your taste buds. When you have derived every possible pleasure from this taste, you swallow. Now what happens? It's almost silly to ask. What arises in your heart? A craving. How powerful is it? It depends on how good the first bite was. Your least favorite veggie—not so much. A dark chocolate-covered strawberry? Nuclear explosion of desire. We crave more. The better the first bite, the more we want another.

Crave the word of God if indeed you have tasted the Lord is good. Remember what Paul called Scripture? The Word of Christ. The Word of God is the Word of Christ because the whole Bible is about him. To the natural man, it's peas and liver. To the Christian, it's Thanksgiving dinner with all the fixins. Why? To be a Christian is to have tasted by faith the goodness and kindness of Christ. My appetite for spiritual truth is awakened by the Holy Spirit. I have taken into my soul and believed that Jesus is the Son of God who came into this world and died for my sins on the cross. I don't just look at that truth like food on a menu. I have personally tasted and eaten it. I have believed it. And I love it and I love him.

How do we grow? An essential part of growing into maturity is never losing our memory of our first spiritual tasting of the goodness of God in Christ. *You haven't forgotten, have you?* The mercy of God and his kindness to you through Christ—Christian, do you remember—when the sweetness of God's grace turned your hard and selfish heart toward your need and you received by faith forgiveness you could never earn? What a gift! How wonderful Jesus is! Indeed, beautiful. His life and willing sacrifice for you. *Do you remember your first taste?*

Have you tasted the goodness of the Lord? You can know, if like a child, your heart wants "more." The ways we satisfy that desire are many; personal Bible reading, savoring biblical teaching, Scripture memory, talking about spiritual truth with other Christians, and others. But like my daughter, after her first taste of milk, we didn't have to tell her to want more. Her first taste was all it took.

Dear friend, look into your heart. Might a lack of desire for God's truth either in teaching or in application to your life reveal a deeper issue? Have you actually tasted God's goodness in the first place? Have you somehow forgotten? Look at your desires. Do they look like this? Could it be that there is an experience of genuine salvation and a tasting of the goodness of Jesus yet for you to have? "*Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good!*" (Psalm 34:8)

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