

Exhort: Desiring growth in Christ Jesus

Reading: 1st Peter 2

Once more then brethren and sisters, we find our selves gathered together around these emblems of our Heavenly Father's love. Once more we are reminded of the Love of our God, shown too us through the life, death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Shortly we will remember him together in the partaking of bread and wine. In memory of his sacrifice, but also importantly for us, in the promise of his imminent return, for therein brethren and sisters lies our hope. Therefore it is incumbent upon us brethren and sisters that we prepare well for that coming great day.

1st Peter 2 and verses 1 – 3

“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”.

We want to dig into this text and unleash its life giving power to transform our daily lives. That we might be conformed to the image of the one we have come to remember, For as a loving and dutiful wife we have a desire to make ourselves ready.

Now this section within the epistle is all about our personal growth towards maturity in Christ Jesus. The Eternal Spirit through the Apostle Peter, firstly lays before us certain negative attitudes and behaviours, which are detrimental to our individual growth, but more crucially these would destroy ecclesial love, unity and growth.

Our passage begins with “*wherefore or therefore*” depending on which translation you use. This is pointing us back into chapter one and the following verses.

1st Peter 1 and verses 22 – 23

“Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently: Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever”.

These earlier words of the spirit given through Peter speak of the **purifying and sanctifying effect** of the word of God upon our lives, as we came into the truth.

It also describes for us brethren and sisters the form of godly love that must be evident within the ecclesia for Christ like growth to occur.

Now as we return to chapter two, and in this first verse we are presented with five sinful attitudes and behaviours, which would undermine, limit and eventually negate the effect of the word in our personal lives. Consequently these same five sins are specifically chosen. To paint a contrary destructive picture to ecclesial love, which accompanies genuine faith and faithfulness, as we saw earlier in 1:22.

Wherefore introduces the exhortation to remove from our lives -*malice, guile, hypocrisies, envies and evil speakings*. These are to be personally **laid aside** by each one of us brethren and sisters. This is the negative instruction of the spirit we are to heed. So then we are to **put off, cast away, and get rid** of these deadly attitudes and behaviours.

In the Greek this concept of “*laying aside*” carries the idea of shedding dirty clothing at the end of the day. The sense here is of us removing elements of the old man of the flesh, which still lingers within our characters. So then brethren and sisters on account of us all desiring to be loving and growing brethren and sisters in Christ Jesus – *how are we each doing at divorcing and divesting ourselves of these lethal sins?*

Now according to the Greek this concept of “*laying aside*” is to be a continuous and ongoing principle in our daily lives within the truth. So this is not a once only action, but a steady conscious habitual process. According to the grammar this is in the “*middle voice*”, so it indicates to us firstly this is something we must do for ourselves and importantly it is a choice, which we are to each **daily** make.

So then the Spirit is exhorting us through Peter that if we wish to grow towards maturity in Christ Jesus our Lord. Then we need to be laying aside any attitudes, thoughts, feelings, speech and actions that are **malicious, deceitful, hypocritical, envious and slanderous**. For the love of Christ has no part in these evil works of the flesh.

Romans 1 and verses 28 – 31

“And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient; Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers,

Backbiters, haters of God, spiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, Without understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful”.

It’s hard hitting that **four** of these five sins are found here at the end of Romans one!

Verse 1

*“Wherefore laying aside **all** malice, **and all** guile, **and** hypocrisies, **and** envies, **and all** evil speakings”*,

Before we look very briefly at these five aspects of ungodly wickedness brethren and sisters, let us note a few points about how they are listed for us. We must take note of the important little words the conjunction “*and*” and the determined sub modifier “*all*”. For not a word of scripture is ever wasted.

Firstly “*and*” shows to us that these sins have both a cumulative effect and that they are all co-ordinate. Meaning that they are all of equal value, there is no sliding scale here to rationalise with in order to minimise their destructive power and ramifications.

Secondly in with regards to the word “*all*”* three of these sins, **malice, guile and evil speakings** are all prefixed by this sub modifier. This indicates to us that unlike hypocrisies and envies, these three sins are also classes of sin, which have levels or shades to them. Without then the addition of the word “*all*”, we would most likely miss this crucial point.

*All = each and every occurrence and the collective amount
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Finally in the AV rendering at least, *hypocrisies*, and *envies*, and *evil* speakings, are all in the plural indicating sadly their **repetitive** nature. With those preliminary thoughts, what are we to make then of these five sins, which we are all to crucify?

Malice, which in the NET Bible is rendered “*all evil*”, is actually a general catch all word for “*wickedness & evil*”. It is translated for us as “*malice*”, because it is referring to the harbouring of ill will towards others, a desire to injure, hurt and to see others suffer. **Malice** is a good clarification of the sense implied here (*Titus 3:3 quote*).

Indeed in English “*malice*” is an emotionally powerful word. Carrying with it a sense of real hate and intentionally to it, **let us** grasp this brethren that we might be forewarned. For sincere and earnest mutual love that the spirit desires within the ecclesia cannot be developed in an environment where such subtle hatred exists.

Our second sin that of “*guile*”, which is no less catastrophic. For with this sin, pretence is the agenda deceiving others to believe something, which isn’t true to gain some advantage. The original meaning of this Greek word is a “*fish hook*”, which you bait in order to catch the fish, so we see again there is **premeditation here** (*Contrast 1 Peter 2:22 quote*).

Now the third of our sins is that of “*hypocrisies*”, which also is a form of **calculated** deceit, where we conceal our true nature to protect our selves in some way. To delude others by play action in other words its all only external show like the Pharisees. With such a sin – sincere love is entirely missing (*Matthew 28:23 quote*).

The fourth sin is that of “*envies*”, a truly poisonous sin to the person with the problem, which will eventually destroy them thoroughly. This is a desire to be like or to have what someone else has. But sadly it also has a component that they should no longer have it or that they should never have had whatever is envied. There is a basic level of **resentment** built into envy (*Galatians 5:21 quote*). If left unchecked envy will lead to despising and hatred.

Resentment focuses negatively back upon our God!

Finally the AV renders our last sin to avoid that of “*evil speakings*”; most modern versions translate this term as “*slander*”. Again slander like the other four sins listed is a **wilful** and very pernicious agent. Sadly it is the easiest and most common of the five for us to fall into. Speaking falsely of and disparaging others also includes the idea of backbiting (*2nd Corinthians 12:20 quote*).

Malice and envy deal with how we view our brethren and sisters and guile and hypocrisy with how we manipulate our brethren and sisters for advantage. Finally slander is how we ensure that we remain in control to achieve our intentional ends.

For all of these noxious sins are purposely destructive of the love and spirit of community that is necessary for an ecclesia to function and to grow into an holy temple in the Lord. For all of them destroy the trust and openness, which is necessary for love to operate, as our Heavenly Father intends.

Let us be honest brethren and sisters let us fully acknowledge with possibly the exception of malice, which may take some time to develop. The other four of these sins are ones we could all fall into and practice.

Having then briefly described what these five sins are and just how **ruinous** to ecclesial life they can be. What is the Spirit's instruction and remedy to overcome these works of the flesh - that we might be able to grow in Christ by putting away such wickedness?

Returning to this earlier picture from the first chapter of the first Epistle of Peter. We find that our first antidote to *malice, guile, hypocrisy, envy & slander* is that of godly love, after the example of our Lord and Master. We recall his commandment, "*that ye love one another, as I have loved you*".

1st Peter 1 and verses 22 – 23

*"Seeing ye have **purified** your souls in **obeying the truth** through the Spirit unto **unfeigned love** of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a **pure heart fervently**".*

Purity is the first characteristic that we see here and it's attended by "*obedience*", which means that we have heard the word and we have acted upon it. Most importantly we not only act it out, but crucially we submit ourselves unto its authority over us. For brethren and sisters, we do not sit in authority over the scriptures; rather The Scriptures sit in authority over us and we must yield our selves obediently to it.

The next thing we note from this passage concerning our purification is that "*love*" must be present. Now fascinatingly here, we find both "*Phileo*" and "*agape*" love in this verse. For the phrase "*love of the brethren*" is a related word to "*phileo*", speaking of warmth, kindness towards and a general liking for ones brethren and sisters.

Then in the phrase "*see that ye love one another*", we have the ongoing continuous active commandment to "*agape*" one another. To choose and esteem each other in the divine manner, taking the long view and being willing to practically sacrifice for each other, as our Lord has done for us. Both loves must be finally evident amongst us.

1st John 3 and verses 16 & 18

"Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth".

Then the final observation I want to bring to your attention from this verse, is that this “love”, is an evidence here of our purification and sanctification if it is present in us brethren. That this “love” is further qualified for us with not one, or even two, but **three** added qualifying descriptors, so we are left by the Eternal Spirit in no doubt what our Heavenly Father desires of each one of us brethren and sisters.

Firstly our love is to be “*unfeigned*”; in other words it is to be **sincere and utterly genuine**. Now not only that it is to be undisguised, so evidently displayed and given to **all** unreservedly, without exception, so that there is no hint of **malice, guile, hypocrisy, envy or slander**.

Secondly we note that it is to be “*pure*” from the heart, free from any bias, hypocrisy or any moral taint whatsoever all of those five sins in the first verse of chapter two.

Then finally our love brethren and sisters is to be “*fervently*” applied. This word means to actively stretch out to one another, without ceasing. And when indeed it is so stretched out it is to be both intense and totally earnest on our part in its giving.

Brethren and sisters when we learn to love in this way then we prove that the word of God is indeed active and authoritative in our lives. More importantly we will equally attest that our Lord’s atoning work, which we are here to remember, has real meaning for us. The result of this love is that it blocks the development of the works of the flesh that those five sins of malice - guile, hypocrisy, envy and slander symbolise.

Love then is the first motivational principle that we can apply to overcome such sin in our lives and in our ecclesial relationships. Returning now to the 2nd chapter:

1st Peter 2 and verses 2 – 3

“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”.

Now the second antidote to the formation of these five **toxic** sins is that of *desiring* the sincere milk of the word of God. Now the word for “*desiring*” is a compound word in the Greek, which has a prefix that **intensifies** it. So this word means to long, to yearn and to really exceedingly crave for something. The spirit aids us here with a word picture to help us grasp the attitude and strength required from us of this “*desiring*”.

“*As a new born babes*”, the sense is not that of being a new believer in Christ Jesus. But rather, as believers let us act as a baby who is only a few hours, days old, who single-mindedly craves their mothers milk. This is the **level of intensity** that is being spoken of here; it is also an acknowledgement from us of our need for the word of God, just as we daily crave food. This **desiring** then is the second motivational principle that we can apply to overcome such sin in our own lives and in our ecclesial relationships.

Luke 4 and verse 4 / Job 23 and verse 12 / Jeremiah 15 and verse 16

“ It is written, That man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God. I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food. Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart.”

Now returning to this word for “*desiring*” in verse two, it is an ongoing continuous active **imperative command** in the Greek. In other words, brethren and sisters, as a command it is not an optional extra. If we are to be obedient and faithful, as was our Lord symbolised before us in these emblems of bread and wine, we must desire the word of life.

It must be noted that desiring the word is fundamental and **foundational** to us accessing the word of God in reading, listening to, meditating upon and studying that word, desiring must come first. Our loving Heavenly Father knows exactly the difficulty we will have with this, hence the commandment given.

But you may say to me Bro. Wayne, I don’t feel like desiring the word, I am just not wired that way! But God is saying to each one of us **that we must discipline ourselves to so long for the word of God**. If we want to mortify the deeds of the body in order to live for God, then **disciplined*** is what we each must become.

Now our God brethren and sisters understands our difficulty here and he seeks to help, in that milk is pleasant to the taste and refreshing to drink. This thought is develop further by the spirit in the third verse.

* So how are you doing at being personally disciplined?

So then having cast away sin, now we have the positive command to replace those ungodly attitudes, feelings and behaviours with a godly alternative. That of being utterly dependent upon and in “*desiring the sincere milk of the word*”.

Seeking to be daily nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine. For the word of God, which is able to make us wise unto salvation is described here, as “*sincere milk*”. Note the qualifying term “*sincere*”, which means that it is “*guileless*”, it is pure unmixed without error, unadulterated. The very opposite of the sins mentioned in the first verse.

So through the renewing of our minds the **purity** of the word brethren and sisters strengthens us in our battle against sin. Let us remember this book, will either keep you from sin, or sin will keep you from this book.

If you’re using a modern version, it may say something like this as we move through this 2nd verse, “*the pure spiritual milk*”. Now the word “*spiritual*” is not apparently present in the AV. But it is implied in the meaning of the word for “*word*”. Which is “*reasonable*” or rational. So the word contains, what is spiritually sensible and what conforms to reality as the divine mind explains for us in the text.

This pure spiritual / reasonable milk of the word is the means of our growth and **let us** recall maturity is the goal of the Eternal Spirit here. Now although this verb is the primary verb of this paragraph “*that ye may grow*”*, it is an ongoing continuous **passive possibility**. This growth desired by the spirit in each one of us brethren and sisters, is the result of our obedience. Is totally dependent upon our firstly “*laying aside*” those five sins and then intensely “*desiring*” the sincere milk of this word.

1st Peter 2 and verse 3

“*If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious*”.

*Modern translations add “ <i>up to salvation</i> ”.
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Now the Eternal Spirit through the Apostle provides us with the third and final motivation towards our growth. Namely our previous experience of our great and gracious God through his providence care in our daily lives and through his word.

The “*if so be*” at the beginning of this final verse does not introduce an element of doubt into the picture. Rather the spirit through Peter desires each one of us to recall and make a positive assertion of all the ways our Heavenly Father has been and is continually gracious, kind and good to us personally.

So that this **remembrance** forms for us this third and final motivational principle that we can apply to overcome such sin in our lives and in our ecclesial relationships.

Each one of us has indeed “*tasted that the Lord is gracious*” brethren and sisters, we do so week by week in the partaking of these emblems of our Lord’s sacrifice. The Apostle through the spirit is quoting from the eighth verse of psalm thirty-four, which is all about the deliverance of the righteous through trouble by our Heavenly Father.

That deliverance is beautifully evident before us in these emblems and in our partaking of them, which we are all thankfully about to engage in brethren and sisters.

So let us see in this bread the word of life modelled in our Master, which fills us with hope in the promises of our God. Likewise in the wine let us understand after the example of the one we remember now that those promises need to be acted upon in our daily lives to become a reality.

For our lord lovingly gave his life in complete obedience to his father’s will. Surely our only reasonable response for the love shown to each one of us is to follow the exhortation of the Eternal Spirit through the Apostle:

2nd Peter 3 and verse 18

“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”.