

1 Peter 1:21–2:5 — Pure Things

Glory, Faith, Hope, Love, New Birth, and the Living and Abiding Word

Scripture Reading: 1 Peter 1:21–2:5

“...who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God.

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. For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: but the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word by which the gospel is preached unto you.

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.

To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.”

A Theme of Purity

One of the consistent themes of 1 Peter is things that are pure. As a reading practice, it is worth pausing at each verse to identify what is pure in it, because

almost without fail something pure is right there. Nine times out of ten you will find it without searching, and often more than one pure thing is present. This stands in deliberate contrast with 2 Peter, which returns again and again to corruption — false teachers, despisers of truth, the rot that works through profession. First Peter fills the soul with pure things; the second epistle exposes the impure. Both are needed.

In verse 21, the pure thing is the glory that God the Father gave to his dear Son. There is not the slightest impurity connected with that glory — had there been, it would have reflected upon the Father who gave it. This is what is called acquired glory. The Lord Jesus possesses intrinsic glory, the glory which he has had from eternity and which never changes. But there is also acquired glory — glory received as a result of the cross and the laying down of his life. Acts 2:36 gives it content: “God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.” He was Lord before the cross, yes; he was the Christ before the cross. But in resurrection, these designations attach to him as acquired things, because God has made him so.

Faith and Hope as Pure Things

Faith and hope are also pure in verse 21, but their purity derives not from themselves but from their object. It is the object that determines the purity — and the object here is the God who raised Christ from the dead and gave him glory. The man in the gospel who said “Lord, I believe; help thou my unbelief” had faith that was not unmixed; it was not pure in that sense. It is always better when it is.

First John 3:3 connects hope with purity: “Every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.” The standard is “as he is pure” — as Christ is pure, not as the believer is pure in himself. The last three words of verse 2 and the last three words of verse 3 are the same: “as he is.” It commends itself to the

soul that the standard should be external, not internal. To look within for the standard of purity is to find something that constantly shifts; to look to Christ is to have the fixed and absolute standard.

Faith and hope are almost always found in company with love. In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul says that faith, hope, and love now abide, and the greatest of these is love. So one can look ahead in our passage to find where love appears — and it is explicit in the very next verse: “unto unfeigned love of the brethren.” Faith and hope in verse 21; love in verse 22. The triplet is complete.

Purified Souls: Obedience, Truth, and Unfeigned Love

Verse 22 introduces something different in emphasis: “Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth.” All that has come before in the chapter is what God has done. Here is something that the believer has done. Not all Christians are characterized by this obedience, and the absence of it produces an impurity of soul. James 4:8 gives the solemn picture: “Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double-minded.” The double-minded person has two objects — Christ on one side, the world or the flesh or the devil on the other. What is needed is a single eye, a heart purified by having one object only.

The practical means is not law. The law is outside a person and imparts nothing to him but a curse if he fails to keep it. The way to deal with the flesh is not to put it under law but to walk in the Spirit (Galatians 5:16); so here, the way to purify the soul is not legal effort but obedience to the truth. And the result of that obedience is unfeigned love of the brethren. This is the direction of causation that the Bible gives — and it is the reverse of the natural, fleshly approach. The world would say: work on your relationships with one another first, get that sorted out, and then draw near to God. Scripture says: first things first; obey the truth, and unfeigned love will flow from that.

A parallel is found in 1 John 1:7: “If we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another.” Again the order is the same — walk in the light, and fellowship with one another follows. If every true Christian separated from every evil he knew about and backed away from it, they would soon find themselves bumping into one another, backing away from other evils, and would find themselves gathered together on the ground of the one principle: separation from evil is God’s principle of unity.

Born Again of Incorruptible Seed

Verse 23 traces the origin of all these incorruptible things — faith, hope, love, purity — to new birth. Without verse 23, one might read verses 21 and 22 and conclude that faith, hope, and love are capable of being produced by some sort of self-improvement method, some sequence of steps. But Peter traces them all to our being born again, not of corruptible seed but of incorruptible, by the word of God which liveth and abideth. These things are the fruit of a new nature, not the achievement of the old.

The Lord told Nicodemus: “Ye must be born again.” Without that, what the natural heart brings forth is simply sins — over and over again, just sins. Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. The word of God is inseparable from the new birth. And J.N. Darby wrote: “If you will only let the pure word of God abide in your heart, it will sweep away all the cobwebs of the flesh.” The word is pure; the flesh is cobwebs. Let the pure thing in, and the cobwebs go.

The word of God which liveth and abideth is set in explicit contrast with the glory of man, which is as the flower of grass. Grass withereth. The flower falleth away. But the word of the Lord endureth forever. The Lord Jesus has intrinsic glory which never diminishes; the acquired glory given him by the Father in resurrection endures forever; and the word by which the gospel is preached unto

us has the same character — it lives and abides.

The evangelist's task is difficult in a particular way: he stands before an audience that he cares about — the lost ones — and that audience is dead in trespasses and sins. He is preaching to corpses. What he does is set the word of God before souls, and then everything else — the preacher's fervor, the craft of the sermon, the anecdote — should back off and let God use his word. A brother once known would stand at a gospel meeting and simply quote scripture after scripture, verse following verse with hardly a word of his own in between, and the effect was precisely this: the living word was set before souls. The Lord used it.

As Newborn Babes, Desire the Sincere Milk

Chapter 2 opens with a laying aside: malice, guile, hypocrisies, envies, evil speakings. These are the things that choke the word in the soul. And then the positive: “as newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby.” The sincere milk is pure — uncontaminated, undiluted. And growth requires desire. A newborn does not need to be argued into desiring milk; the desire is instinctive, urgent, immediate. That is the kind of desire for the word of God that belongs to one who has been born again.

A Living Stone: Coming, and Being Built

The passage closes with a picture of corporate privilege. To whom coming — the coming is individual, personal, continuous — as unto a living stone, disallowed by men but chosen of God and precious. He who is the living stone was rejected by men; the very builders cast him aside. But God chose him and gave him the place of supreme honor. And those who come to him — as lively stones — are built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.

The spiritual house is built of living stones. They are not dead stones, shaped and cut and fitted by human hands. They are living, because they have come to the one who is himself the living stone. And the holy priesthood exists to offer up spiritual sacrifices — not the blood of bulls and goats, but those things which ascend to God from souls that have been redeemed, purified, and born again by his living and abiding word.

The word of the Lord endureth forever. And this is the word by which the gospel is preached unto you.