

The Word that Endures Forever (1 Peter 1:14-2:3)

Expository Lessons from the First Letter of Peter

I. Background

- a. As we discussed in the prior message, Peter was taught directly by Jesus, the ultimate Teacher. He may have been the foremost student of Jesus.
- b. Jesus explained the Hebrew Scriptures to Peter and the rest of his apostles throughout his teaching ministry and especially after His resurrection (in **Luke 24**), when Jesus explained how He had fulfilled all the prophecies.
- c. Peter, therefore, provides a great window into what was handed down from Jesus regarding the prophecies. We can explore this through Peter's two letters and also his speeches in the first half of the book of **Acts**.
- d. Peter quotes extensively from the Old Testament in **1 Peter**, using examples and quotes to support essentially every point he is making in this letter.
- e. In the prior two messages we discussed how Peter taught:
 - i. Our hope, our goal, is salvation (rather than any benefits or blessings we may see in this life).
 - ii. Trials come into our lives to refine our faith, similar to the way gold is refined through fire. We can rejoice, since they will lead to the goal of our faith: *the salvation of our souls*.
 - iii. The prophets wrote about this salvation that we are inheriting. They were led by the Holy Spirit to reveal the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow.

II. Holiness and Fear

- a. Read **1 Peter 1:13-21**.
- b. Peter calls us to live holy lives, no longer conforming to the lusts of the flesh of the old way of life. In addition to the one reason previously given, Peter adds three more reasons.
 - i. As previously explained, in **1 Peter 1:6-13**, we are being refined through trials. This follows the pattern revealed through the prophets regarding our salvation and Christ: suffering followed by glory.
 - ii. To that, Peter now adds *three more reasons* why we need to live holy lives.

1. We should be holy because God is holy. (**1 Peter 1:14-16**)
 2. We should be holy because God will be judging us on the basis of what we do. (**1 Peter 1:17**)
 3. We should be holy because we have been redeemed at an extremely high price. (**1 Peter 1:18-19**)
- iii. Be holy because the Lord is holy.
1. This statement, "Be holy because I am holy" is made by the Lord several times in **Leviticus**.
 - a. Read **Leviticus 11:1-8** and **11:41-45**. This is one classic example where this statement appears in **Leviticus**.
 - b. This chapter in **Leviticus** is where the Lord explains the distinction between the clean animals (which they may eat) in contrast with the unclean animals (which they are forbidden to eat).
 - c. For example, among land animals the clean animals are those that *both* chew the cud and have split hooves.
 - d. At the conclusion of the delineation of clean vs. unclean animals, the Lord explains the reason why they must eat only the clean animals. There it says that the people must be holy *because the Lord is holy!*
 2. Remember the instructions given regarding the sacred oil and incense in Exodus, which illustrate in practical terms what the word "holy" means.
 - a. Read **Exodus 30:22-33**.
 - b. The holy oil was set apart for a special purpose. It was not to be treated as a "common" thing.
 - c. This passage helps me to appreciate the meaning of the term "holy". It means to be *set apart for a special purpose*.
 3. The physical requirements (like diet) for the people to be "set apart" were shadows for what has now been revealed through Jesus Christ: we are now to live lives as holy people, set apart from all the other people of the world, for God. Those things in Leviticus were pointing to something greater that they foreshadowed.

- a. Read **Colossians 2:14-3:17**.
- b. On the cross, Jesus wiped out the handwritten requirements of the Law of Moses (like the dietary restrictions we just read from **Leviticus 11**). They were "nailed to the cross", and crucified with the body of Jesus.
- c. Therefore, we are no longer to be judged on the basis of food, religious festivals, etc. (as under Law of Moses).
- d. Those things in the Law of Moses *were shadows of things to come*. Now in Christ we see the realities that were foreshadowed before.
 - i. For example, imagine if you first saw only a *silhouette or shadow* of someone like Abraham Lincoln. Once the actual person appeared in the flesh, you would be able to recognize him from having seen the shadow beforehand.
 - ii. Now that the real thing (the fulfillment) has come *we no longer follow the old shadows*.
 - iii. The old Law of Moses with its requirements was nailed to the cross.
 - iv. The holy life we are now to live is a life with our minds set apart for God, putting to death the old passions (fornication, covetousness, anger, filthy language out of our mouths)
 - v. Instead, the new set-apart life of Christian holiness is to be demonstrated by kindness, longsuffering, forgiving one another, and especially *putting on love toward one another*.
- iv. Be holy (and live in fear of God) in view of the fact that we will be judged on the basis of our works.
 1. "And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear;" (**1 Peter 1:17**, NKJV)
 2. **Question:** Did Peter actually say we will all be judged according to our works? Aren't we judged on the basis of the works of Christ, *what He did for us on the cross*? Aren't all our

righteous deeds like "filthy rags" in the sight of God (**Isaiah 64:6**)?

- a. Note that the Greek word Peter uses here that is translated "work" (ergon, ἔργον) is the very same word used by Paul in **Ephesians 2:8-9** where he says we are saved "by grace through faith...not by works".
- b. Read **Revelation 20:11-15**.
 - i. The scene described is the Day of Judgment, when all (the great and small) are being judged.
 - ii. It says, "and the dead were judged according to their works".
- c. Read **Romans 2:3-11**.
 - i. Paul quotes from **Psalm 62:13** (designated **Psalm 61:13** in the LXX), where it says, "You repay every man according to his deeds (= works)". Paul's quote here follows the wording of the LXX, and Paul literally says, "according to his works".
 - ii. Literally, from the American Standard version translation, it says "who will render to every man according to his works..." (**Romans 2:6**, ASV 1901)
- d. Jesus taught the same thing; see the story of the sheep and the goats at the Day of Judgment, in **Matthew 25**.
- e. James taught the same thing in **James 2**.
 - i. He spoke there of two types of faith that one can have:
 1. Dead faith (belief without any works, without obedience to the commands of Jesus). This kind of faith is *useless!* **VERSUS...**
 2. Saving faith, which is made complete through works of obedience.
 - ii. "...faith without works *is dead*..." (**James 2:26**, NKJV)

- f. Therefore we see that Jesus (the ultimate Teacher) and his students Peter, Paul, John (in **Revelation**) and James all taught that we will be judged according to our works, namely according to our actions, what we do, how we live our lives.
3. Peter, consistent with everyone else in the New Testament, taught that one of the main reasons we Christians need to live set-apart lives is that we must be prepared to face judgment day, when we will be judged according to our works!
- a. Many Protestants teach that if we believe something we do (works) has anything do with our salvation, this is the one thing that will disqualify us from being saved! However, this is exactly what Jesus and the apostles taught, and what the earliest Christians understood as well.
- v. Be holy because we have been redeemed at a very high price.

1. **Question:** How much does God love you?

- a. This question reminds me of a children's story that I often read to my grandson Elijah, '*Guess How Much I Love You*'.
 - i. There are only two characters in this story: a young, small rabbit and its much larger parent.
 - ii. The baby rabbit tells the parent that he loves him some amount he can quantify (as high as he can stretch himself, as far as he can see, etc.), but he is always outdone by the parent.
 - iii. Finally, the baby rabbit says, "I love you all the way to the moon", to which the parent responds, "I love you all the way to the moon...*and back!*"
 - iv. The parent always outdoes the child's love.

2. How much does God love us?

- a. The most valuable things that we can think of might be some vast quantity of gold and silver.
 - i. Even today, the central banks of nations still stockpile tons of gold, presumably to back up their currencies if ever necessary.

- b. Peter says that God showed He loves us even more than that (more than even large quantities of silver or gold), by redeeming us with something vastly *more precious*: the precious blood of His Son, the lamb without defect (borrowing from the language of the original Passover Lamb, in **Exodus 12**).
- 3. A story that Alison and I were told, through a video, as part of our pre-marriage counseling many years ago, about a woman, referred to as '*The Ten Cow Mahanna*', in the setting of a rural village in Africa.
 - a. The prospective husband, rather than bartering down the cost of the bride price with the father-in-law, insisted on paying the *extraordinarily high bride price of ten cows*.
 - b. The bride (whose name was *Mahanna*) felt incredibly honored and appreciated.
 - i. This motivated her to love her husband even more in response.
- 4. In appreciation for the exceedingly high cost that God paid to redeem us, much higher than all the gold in Fort Knox (or in the vaults of the Federal Reserve Bank of New York), we should be tremendously appreciative and live accordingly.
- vi. Some teach that we should live holy lives only in response to what God did for us (and are criticized for teaching that what we do has nothing to do with our salvation). Others teach we need to live holy lives in order to be saved (and are criticized for teaching that we are thereby doing it out of selfish motivation, or are trying to 'earn' our salvation).
 - 1. Interesting to me that Peter here uses BOTH arguments, so it is not an either/or situation!

III. The Enduring Word of God

- a. Read **1 Peter 1:22-2:3**.
 - i. Here Peter quotes from **Isaiah 40:6-8**.
 - ii. Read **Isaiah 40:1-11**.
 - 1. Part of this text is a famous prophecy about John the Baptist.

2. Isaiah says that all men are like grass and their glory like the flowers of the field (that quickly fades away).
- b. Peter ties this teaching to our spiritual rebirth, to being born again.
 - i. The first birth was of corruptible seed (which decays and dies).
 1. Like grass and flowers of the field, man's glory is very temporary.
 2. Think of all the glories of men (wealth, fame, beauty, athletic accomplishments, political power, etc.). Soon these will be gone in death.
 3. Read **Ecclesiastes 2:1-23**.
 - a. Depressing: everything comes to nothing; all is taken away in death.
 - b. Some translations render this pursuit of meaning in the things of this world as "a chasing after the wind" (**Ecclesiastes 2:17** and elsewhere).
 - ii. The second birth was of incorruptible seed (which does not decay, and endures forever).
 1. The incorruptible seed is the word of God.
 2. The word of the Lord endures forever!
 3. That word is the gospel preached to us.
 4. If this seed is planted in our hearts and grows, through the new birth, we will live forever as well.
 5. Devoting ourselves to the word of God, the gospel, and spreading it to others will produce something that lasts forever, unlike the glories of men that quickly fade.
 - iii. Since we have been born again of this new, enduring seed, Peter says this is yet one more reason to put off the old ways of our old perishable nature (**1 Peter 2:1-3**).
 - c. We learn something else from Peter about the word of God. It is like milk to a baby.
 - i. We are like babies who crave their mother's milk.
 - ii. Mother's milk is the perfect food that provides infants with all the nutrition needed.

1. Each species of mammal produces the right kind of milk needed by its offspring.
2. Milk provides all the fluids, proteins, vitamins, fuel, etc. that the baby needs.
3. From a New England hospital (Dartmouth-Hitchcock) website, advice to new mothers regarding breastfeeding:
 - a. "Before you give your baby formula, we would like to share some of the risks of supplementing with formula if there is no medical reason for doing so.
 - b. "Some studies suggest that just one formula feeding can change a baby's normal intestinal bacteria. This could increase a baby's risk of infection in the digestive tract. It could also increase their risk for immune problems later in life.
 - c. "Infants who receive formula feedings are also at a higher risk for these illnesses:
 - i. Acute otitis media (ear infections).
 - ii. Asthma (a condition of the lungs that causes problems with breathing).
 - iii. Diabetes – type 1 and 2 (a problem in controlling the body's sugar levels).
 - iv. Eczema (an itchy condition of the skin).
 - v. Lower respiratory tract (lung) infections (including increased risk of admission to the hospital).
 - vi. Obesity (being overweight).
 - d. "Other risks of formula feeding:
 - i. Formula is harder to digest for a new baby. It stays in the stomach longer than breast milk, which may cause your baby to feed less often and could cause a decrease in your milk production.
 - e. "Babies who drink only their mother's breast milk receive the most health benefits, including less risk of asthma, diabetes, ear infections, eczema, obesity and

respiratory tract infections. Breastfeeding also lowers an infant's risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) and childhood leukemia (a cancer of the blood)."

4. God's amazing design for mother's milk was under-appreciated by the previous generation (who thought that chemists and corporations could come up with something better).
 - a. Now we better appreciate how extraordinary God designed mother's milk to be precisely what a baby needs for healthy development.
 - b. The composition of a mother's milk even adjusts over time, from birth onward, to appropriately meet the needs of a maturing baby.
- iii. **Spiritual Application for Us:** The Lord has given us the word of God to meet all of our *spiritual* needs, whether we recognize it or not! It was designed that way by the Lord. If we stray and turn to other things, it will lead to spiritual malnourishment and spiritual diseases.
- iv. **Question:** Is its mother's milk *all* that a baby needs?
1. **Answer:** Yes, and no.
 2. Let's not forget that while mother's milk is the perfect *food* for infants, *they also need other things*, such as: clean air, loving attention, physical affection and diaper changes (and at some point, discipline too).
 3. Similarly, in addition to the Word of God (our own perfect *spiritual food*) *we also need* the fellowship of other Christians in the church, the Holy Spirit, prayer, confessing sin, etc.
 4. However, the word of God (if we have those other things) can make us "thoroughly equipped".
 - a. Read **2 Timothy 3:13-17**.
 - b. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God (some translations render it, "God breathed").
 - c. It is useful for many things; through it we can become "*thoroughly equipped* for every good work."
- d. The word of God is also like manna in the Wilderness.
- i. Read **Deuteronomy 8:1-3**.

- e. The word of God is also described as water to a tree in the desert.
 - i. Read **Psalm 1:1-3**.
 - ii. We are called to not simply read the law of the Lord but also to *meditate on it day and night*.
 - iii. The person who does so will be like a tree planted by streams of water.
 - 1. In a desert climate, that tree will flourish even if there is a long time of no rain, while the other trees around it are drying up and dying.
- f. The word of God also keeps us from sin, is like honey, gives wisdom, is like a lamp guiding us in a dark world, and can be used as an offensive weapon against our spiritual enemies.
 - i. Read **Psalm 119:1-16** (designated **Psalm 118** in the LXX).
 - 1. A young man can keep his way pure, avoiding sin, by *hiding word of the Lord in his heart (Psalm 119:11)*.
 - 2. This points to a wonderful benefit of memorizing portions of the Scriptures.
 - ii. Read **Psalm 119:97-105**.
 - 1. The law of the Lord makes us wiser than our enemies.
 - 2. The teachings of the Lord are sweeter than honey and honeycomb.
 - 3. The word of the Lord is like a lamp to our feet, a light guiding our path in the darkness.
- g. The word is an offensive weapon, as a sword.
 - i. "And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God;" (**Ephesians 6:17**, NKJV)
 - ii. Peter used this spiritual sword in against his opponents in **Acts 4:11**: "this is the stone which you builders rejected...", quoting from **Psalm 118:22** (designated **Psalm 117:22** in the LXX).
 - iii. Jesus used this spiritual sword three times when tempted by Satan in **Matthew 4:1-11**.
 - 1. Each time Jesus is tempted by Satan, He responds, "It is written...", then He quotes from **Deuteronomy**.

h. Closing Challenges:

- i. Do you see the word of God this way?
- ii. Is it your daily bread, your light in a dark place?
- iii. Is the word of God your powerful weapon in times of trial and temptation?
- iv. Are you devoted to studying and meditating on the word of God every day, seeing it as your source of strength and inspiration?
- v. Is it for you the first place to turn, to be fully equipped, rather than going to the world for answers on all sorts of things, including:
 1. Relations with other disciples and those in the world.
 2. Guidance in family relationships, including parenting.
 3. How the church is to operate.
 4. How you are to treat elderly parents.
 5. Relationships with the government, even in times of persecution
 6. How to handle money, work, property, etc.
 7. Any new challenges that come up.
- vi. Are you as dependent on God's word as a baby is on its mother's milk?
- vii. I am reminded of a story about one of my personal heroes, Restoration Movement preacher and teacher James Harding. In the eulogy given at Harding's funeral, one of his friends remarked that he had never seen anyone responsible for getting so many people to read the Bible so much.
 1. Harding's love for the Scriptures was infectious.
 2. Wherever Harding went, he would form local groups of disciples who would commit to reading the Bible every day and through the entire Bible in a year.
 3. Often I have thought that the greatest, most significant impact I could ever have as a teacher would be to inspire others to love and be devoted to reading the Bible on their own. That was the great legacy that James Harding left.