
ORIENTATION TO SPIRITUAL FORMATION IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

11 PETER 2:2

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Part of the difficulty in studying spiritual formation which must be recognized from the outset is the extreme variety present in the discussion of the topic. Varieties of definition and practice are the most noticeable. Also, this topic has mainly been seen by many as a theological discussion rather than practical and biblical approved means of shaping our lives to be like Christ. Consider our topic last week, we most times read those scriptures as another story or events in the life of Christ without letting the stories speak to us directly. The woman by the well, her story speaks of what we can achieve by telling others about been save through evangelism, whether corporate or personal. The woman caught in adultery teaches of mercy over judgment or justice etc.

One definition of Spiritual formation is seen as the process by which one moves and is moved from self-worship to Christ-centred. Focus is on self-denial as a general condition of life in God's present and eternal

kingdom. Another defines spiritual formation as the process by which God forms Christ's character in believers by the ministry of the Spirit, in the context of community, and in accordance with biblical standards. The process involves the transformation of the whole person in thoughts, behaviours, and styles of relating with God and others. It results in a life of service to others and witness for Christ.

Today our focus is on *orientation to spiritual formation in the New Testament*. I just feel that this should have been the first discussion after the overview. My point been that the term orientation relates to an introduction, as to guide one in adjusting to new surroundings, employment, activity, or the like. If one gets an admission into a university, he gets an orientation to understand how to and how not to behave while on campus and so on. This is not to discredit the beautiful lessons we have studied so far on *spiritual formation*, just a thought.

Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation – 1 Peter 2:2 (NIV)

Peter's emphasis is on growth whether as a new baby or not, he says you must grow. His focus is that more than the food you eat, you must have God's Word! Peter says, if you must grow; you must have God's Word in your life!

We must have God's Word to grow in our salvation.

We will look at three things in our discussion this morning regarding **1 Peter 2:2** in line with our spiritual formation:

- What does the Word Look like?
- How to be motivated to drink it in; and,
- How to drink it in.

1. WHAT DOES THE WORD LOOK LIKE? – 1 Peter 2:2

- **The Word Is Pure**

The Greek word means, literally, not deceitful. It means unadulterated, *not watered down*. Dishonest merchants in that day would add water to their milk to make more profit. This was "*deceitful*" milk. Peter tells us to long for the pure, not-deceitful milk.

This means that the Bible, if you take it straight, tells you the honest truth about yourself. It exposes the very thoughts and motives of your heart so that you have no where to hide (**Hebrews 4:12-13**). We tend to deceive and flatter ourselves or even

water down the word of God so that I do not offend brethren, leaders etc. That is not the pure word of God. The Word of God cuts through the deception and lays out the truth so that we can deal with our problems.

There are legions of churches where the Word of God is being watered down by upbeat preachers who want to be liked and who want to make everybody feel good about themselves. This is happening. We must be careful that we do not stifle people to speak only what we want to hear. In as much as the pulpit is not a place to pass personal grievances, truth must not be blocked as the pure word of God is the only medium that can make us grow to salvation. It is just like going to a doctor who does not talk about sickness, but who gives his patients sugar-coated pills that make them feel good without dealing with the root cause of their problems. As the Lord said to Jeremiah, "*They have healed the wound of My people superficially*" (**Jeremiah 6:14**).

The Bible declares that the root cause of our problems is our sin. By confronting our sin and presenting God's remedy for it, the Bible brings lasting healing. So we must try to preach the Bible in its pure, not-deceitful form, because then it confronts us with where our lives have gone astray and shows us God's way to get back on the path.

- **The Word Is Rational**

The literal translation of verse 2 is that we should long for "*the pure, spiritual milk*." The word "*spiritual*"

also means “*rational*” (Greek = “*logikos*,” from “*logos*”). Similar word is used in **Romans 12:1**, where Paul says that *presenting our bodies as a living sacrifice to God is our “spiritual (or rational) service of worship.”* He means that it is a spiritual thing to do, since we do not do it literally (as a burnt offering), but rather spiritually by yielding ourselves to the will of God. And it is the reasonable thing to do in light of God’s great mercies to us.

Peter used the word to show us that he is not talking about literal mother’s milk, but rather about the spiritual milk of the living and abiding Word of God (**1:23**). This spiritual milk is rational – it is grasped with the mind. Thus, Christianity is essentially rational, but not rational in the worldly sense, but rational in a spiritual sense. Human reason must be subject to the written revelation God has given of Himself in the Bible. But you cannot know God without using your mind, since He has revealed Himself in the revelation of the written Word.

According to Dr. Packer, Puritans (*the 16th and 17th Century reformers*) were educators of the mind. They believed that “*the mind must be instructed and enlightened before faith and obedience become possible*”. While they deeply believed that God’s truth must affect not only the head, but also the heart, they also “*regarded religious feeling and pious emotion without knowledge as worse than useless. Only when the truth was being felt was emotion in any way desirable*”.

This balance would correct many of the excesses of our day. I meet many Christians who are heavily subjective. They operate on a feeling level, devoid of solid theological content. Others emphasize theological content, but they are afraid of emotions. The Word of God ought to fill our minds with the knowledge of God and move our hearts with His majesty and love.

- **The Word Is Nourishing**

Peter is referring to a mother’s milk, as the analogy of newborn babes makes clear. He is not contrasting the milk of God’s Word with meat, as Paul does (**1 Corinthians 3:2**). We are always to be feeding on this nourishing milk. It is simple enough for the youngest infant in the faith, but solid enough for the most mature saints.

God has designed a mother’s milk as the perfect food for newborn babies. It will immunize her baby from many illnesses and nourish her baby for growth. God’s Word will protect Christians from the many spiritual diseases which abound and nourish them to grow in the Lord. A mother’s milk will make her baby grow for months without any other food. God’s Word will nourish Christians so that they “*grow toward salvation*” (**2:2**). Peter means salvation in its ultimate sense, which includes everything that God has provided for us who are His children. We never reach a place in this life where we can stop growing.

One thing about kids is that they are excited about growing. God’s children should be that excited about growing

in respect to their salvation. Just as physical growth is not instant or readily seen, so with spiritual growth. You probably won't see it day to day. But if you keep feeding on the milk of the Word, you will be nourished toward growth. That's what the Word of God is like: It's pure; it's rational; it's nourishing milk that will make you grow toward salvation.

2. HOW TO BE MOTIVATED TO DRINK IN IT – 1 Peter 2:2

Peter says that we should be as motivated as a newborn babe is for his mother's milk. Newborn babies have an intense craving for their mother's milk! It doesn't matter if it's 3 a.m. If they're hungry, they let you know about it and do not stop letting you know about it until they get what they are after! The question is, How do you get that kind of motivation for the Word of God?

- **Put Off Relational Sins that Hinder the Word's Effect in Your Life – 1 Peter 2:1**

In the context, these relational sins (2:1) will hinder your motivation for the Word (2:2). To "put off" means to cast aside like you take off dirty clothes. These sins are baggage from our past before we were born again. They surround us as we live in this sinful world. They are standard operating procedure for many people in the world, especially when they get into a tough situation. But Peter says that they are opposed to spiritual growth, and they must be discarded like dirty clothes.

Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind – 1 Peter 2:1.

Christian communication stands against all these worldly ways. We are to speak the truth in love with a view to building up the other person (Ephesians 4:15, 29). Peter says that we are to put off these wrong ways of relating, which implies that we are both responsible for these sins and able, with the Spirit's power, to stop doing them. You do not need years of therapy and delving into your past to stop doing these things. It is a matter of obedience. Make a decisive break with your past and commit yourself to live as a Christian. If you do not, you would not be motivated to drink in God's Word.

- **Focus On God's Kindness – 1 Peter 2:3**

"If you have tasted that the Lord is kind." For Peter, Christ is the Lord. Since this is a quote from Psalm 34:8, it shows that Peter believed Christ to be God ("Yahweh" for the psalmist). Peter here is referring especially to the Lord's kindness or grace that was shown to us when we trusted Him as Savior and Lord. If you are saved, you have tasted of the Lord's kindness, because you know that though you deserved His judgment, He showed you mercy. *"God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).* The cross of Christ, where a holy God made provision for me, the sinner, so that I could experience His forgiveness and receive eternal life as a free gift, ought to be the focus of every Christian

every day. That's why communion is so important; it focuses us on the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ who offered Himself as the sacrifice for our sins. Tasting of the Lord's kindness motivates us to drink in His Word.

3. HOW TO DRINK IN GOD'S WORD

- **Read It**

I am amazed at how many Christians do not read their Bibles! Maybe you are thinking, *"But I am not a reader."* Learn to be a reader! God chose to communicate His Word in written form. Reading is a learned skill that most people can master. While you are learning to read, get the Bible on tape and listen to it. But you also need to learn to read.

- **Study It**

It is not just milk; it is rational milk. You must think or meditate on it to understand it. Observe it carefully: What does the text say? To quote Yogi Berra, *"You can see a lot just by looking."* Interpret it by comparing Scripture with Scripture and asking, what does this passage mean in its context and in light of another Scripture? Get a concordance and

study how words are used in the Bible. Apply it prayerfully: What does it mean to me? How do I need to obey it? Memorize certain portions, so that God can use them in your life during the day. Listen to the Word preached every chance you get.

- **Taste It**

The image of milk and of tasting the Lord's kindness brings up the fact that the Word is not just to fill your head with knowledge. It is to fill your life with delight as you get to know the Divine author and enjoy Him in all His perfections. Taste points both to personal experience and enjoyment. I can't taste for you, nor you for me. We can only taste for ourselves. To taste something, we have to experience it.. You can see and hear and smell at a distance, but you can only taste something by touching it to your tongue. You can only taste God's Word by drawing near to God and personally appropriating the riches of knowing Him. Once you like the taste of something, you do not just eat it to live; you live to eat it. You want it as often as you can get it. God's Word is that way for all who have tasted His kindness.

Conclusion

What is at the bottom of **1 Peter 2:2**. It is a recognition that truly following Christ, truly being a member of his kingdom, flows first from the inner person and does not consist solely of outward acts of compliance or obedience. For one to be like Christ, one must grow through the word, and that can be done when we desire the pure, undiluted word of God. May God bless us.

References

Steven J. Cole, Lesson 8: *Getting into The Word (1 Peter 2:1-3), from the Series: 1 Peter (bible.org)*

Dr. Michael H. Burer, *Orientation to Spiritual Formation with Special Reference to the New Testament – (bible.org)*