

Dear Friends,

In the last ten years, I find myself increasingly reflecting on 2 Timothy 3:16-17. In Verse 16, Paul listed four specific purposes or functions for "All scripture." Each of these terms is uniquely suited for born-again children of God and not for unsaved people. In Verse 17, Paul added emphasis to this point. All Scripture, given by inspiration of God, is for "the man of God" to equip the "man or woman" of God in all points of godly thinking and living. How many other writings did Paul add to this list? None? That should teach us, sometimes more than we want to know, but never more than we need to know. If we compromise our faith and start looking to writings other than Scripture for our faith and our worldview, we need to go back to "All scripture" and study its teachings.

After devoting most of Chapter 1 to our spiritual standing in Jesus, Paul begins the second chapter with "...as newborn babes...." If you have been born again, all of God and all of His grace--nothing of you and your works--what then? How should you think? How should you live your daily life? In the second chapter, indeed, in the remainder of the letter, Peter teaches us the answer to those questions.

First, and applicable to every one of us, there are some attitudes and behaviors that we must "lay aside" before we are that interested in, much less that focused on the "sincere milk of the word." Peter didn't teach that we are to desire the sincere milk of the word to become born again. Rather he taught that we are already newborn babes in Christ. As those infant children in the family of God, we need to blind ourselves to so many sinful thoughts and pursuits that modern Christians have sanctified and baptized, hoping to make them acceptable to the Lord, but they all fail His litmus test in Scripture. Only then can we begin to desire, to drink fully, and begin to grow stronger and more mature in our faith by that "sincere milk of the word."

I love Peter's closing thought to this lesson, "**If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious.**" If we are newborn babes in the family of God, we have already tasted abundantly this truth. Forget all the rancor, anger, bitterness, and sin in the world around us. Have you not also tasted of His graciousness? Do not miss an obvious point. A key definition to our common (And to the Biblical) use of "Grace" is "Graciousness." If we think and speak of and to each other with "Grace," it means that we carefully filter what we think and say, speaking to each other only with "Graciousness." If we allow our carnality to control our life, anger and bitterness may overcome graciousness, and our words will be rooted in bitterness. (Hebrews 12:15 KJV) However, if we actively pursue our belief in our gracious God, we will labor to curb that attitude and its words, striving to speak only in "Graciousness." A rooted belief in the "Graciousness" of God reminds us of the "sincere milk of the word" that He gives to His born-again children who are willing to start each day with a hearty "Lay aside" mindset.

Lord help us to start each day right here. With the "sincere milk of the word."

Lord bless,
Joe Holder

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You're Born Again—Now What?

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. (1 Peter 2:1-3 KJV 1900)

Most languages, English included, contain many words that link and explain the relationship between different ideas. “A” relates to “B” in this way. Our study passage begins with one of those words, “Wherefore.” What Peter wrote in Chapter 1 relates to what he will write in Chapter 2. Because of what was done in Chapter 1, we who benefitted by that action have an obligation to do what Chapter 2 teaches. Throughout Scripture, we are taught “The ethics of grace.” Because God in love for His chosen people has given them His life and a secure preservation of that life to eternity “To come,” we live with a distinct moral obligation to honor and to love Him with every fiber of our being. This idea transforms both the values by which we should live, and it equally transforms the motive that drives us to so live. Our Christian friends who believe in salvation by works to any degree, are motivated to live the Christian life by fear, fear of not doing enough or believing enough. While both they and we believe in many of the same Christian values, there is a world of difference in our motives. We live those values out of love for the Lord and His “Fatherly” care and keeping of us. They live them to gain that outcome eventually and in abiding fear that they haven’t done enough to earn that heavenly blessing.

Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings. Too many Christians of our day think they can keep some of these qualities and still claim to be disciples. During my business career, I encountered some of these folks. They never missed an opportunity to tell people they were Christians, they’d insist on praying before a business meal, but I also witnessed them practicing guile and hypocrisy through self-serving and low business ethics. In fact, Peter warns us. We cannot begin to act out our new-birth Christian life until we “Lay aside,” eliminate from our lives, these sinful motives and actions. Think of these sinful practices like a garment. When we believe in Jesus and strive to live for Him and by His example, the first thing we need to do is to change our moral wardrobe. Don’t put these qualities in your moral closet for future use. Discard them. They shall never be appropriate for your Christian wardrobe. Peter especially emphasizes this full abandonment of this “Old wardrobe” by his use of “All” with the first two qualities. It is not acceptable to lay aside some malice and some guile. We are commanded to lay aside all of it.

1. **All malice.** The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary defines this word as “Badness” or “evil.” The second definition goes into more detail, “The desire to injure another person, active ill will or hatred.” We cross the line in this sin, not only by a desire to do physical injury to another person, but also by the desire to injure them with words. Impugning their motives is a common breach of this ethical failure. “You know, he only wants to do this because....” How do you know what is in his mind? You impute bad motives onto that person based on your personal dislike or disagreement, not based on firsthand knowledge that he may have shared with you regarding his motives. The common practice of this kind of malice fully explains why this forbidden habit stands at the head of this list. Perhaps when we question someone’s motives, we might better question our own motives.

2. **All guile.** Number Two in the list of infamous traits equally deserves Peter’s blanket “All.” There is no situation or occasion when guile is acceptable in the Christian life. To practice guile means to use deceit, or misrepresentation of any kind to wield one’s influence over another. Well meaning Christians can’t sanctify this quality by thinking they can deceive another believer into agreeing with them, because “I know what is best and right more than they.” If what we think is right or best in a given situation, why not openly and sincerely state our belief instead of practicing guile to mislead another? Just a few verses down in this chapter, Peter reminds us of Jesus’ perfect righteousness. “**Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth.**” (1 Peter 2:22 KJV) If Jesus never spoke or acted with guile, we should follow His example. Getting our way by misleading others fails His example and should be faithfully avoided in the Christian life.

3. **Hypocrisies.** Hypocrisy means we give others the idea that we are acting from one motive or interest, but in fact we have different motives. “What I want is all for the good of the church,” for example leads one to think the person has altruistic motives for whatever he/she is promoting. But, if this person is actually working to manipulate others to agree with him/her, hypocrisy is at work. In the Christian life, transparent sincerity should rule. What we lead others to think is our motive should be our true and only reason. “His word is his bond” is a good example of this sincere, non-hypocritical lifestyle.

4. **Envyies.** Envy refers to ill will toward someone because we think they are better or have something we would love to have. “He doesn’t deserve that nearly as much as I.” Matthew 27:18 reveals a surprising point. During Pilate’s examination of Jesus, he perceived that Jesus’ accusers delivered Him to Pilate based on “Envy.”

5. **...and all evil speakings.** Peter has already covered the most common sinful motives and speech, but just in case there are others, he includes them.

We manifest grace and Biblical wisdom if we apply a Biblical filter to every thought we have before we put those thoughts into words.

Let all things be done unto edifying. (1 Corinthians 14:26b KJV)

How might our conversation change if we first challenged our thoughts with this verse? Does what I’m thinking and planning to say have good prospects of edifying those who hear? Those about whom I speak? If not, why should I say it at all? Our speech can enhance or destroy our faith, both in our own heart and in the eyes of those who hear. Think first, think kindly, then speak, would do wonders.

As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby. Peter gave us specific “Lay aside” teaching before beginning this instructive positive lesson. Why? We can’t start to think or act as “newborn babes” whose sole desire is the “sincere milk of the word” until we have emptied our heart and life of the toxic habits named under his “Lay aside” points. If our heart is bitter with any of those sinful attitudes and conduct, we are not acting like newborn babes. We do not at all desire only the sincere milk of the word. And we shall never experience spiritual health and growth so long as we cling to those sinful ways. They foster the “root of bitterness” in us. (Hebrews 12:15 KJV)

A newborn babe has no knowledge of gourmet adult food. Instinctively that baby needs only one food, milk. How many Christians in our day truly maintain a filter over their minds and conduct that looks to Scripture alone for direction and spiritual nutrition? The norm of our time is to look at multiple sources, weigh them all, and mix and match what we most like for our worldview. That mindset shall never realize the rich nutrition of the sincere milk of the word. It guarantees a lifetime of spiritual indigestion and arrested spiritual growth.

Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart: for I am called by thy name, O LORD God of hosts. (Jeremiah 15:16 KJV)

This verse describes the “Newborn babe” mindset toward the Lord and His words, Jeremiah’s life was hardly set in an ideal world. His beloved people had been defeated by the Babylonians. Many of its leaders had been deported to Babylon. The people who remained were confused. Their capital city and their temple of worship were destroyed and in ruins. A perfect world for disillusionment. No wonder Jeremiah is sometimes called the “Weeping prophet.”

However, despite all the negatives that seemingly overwhelmed the world in which Jeremiah lived, he found one thing that gave him joy and optimism. **Thy words were found, and I did eat them.** See the food connection with our study passage. How did this “Diet” set with the prophet?

...and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart. In the world where Jeremiah lived, there was nothing to evoke joy. Despite that world, Jeremiah found something “Other-worldly” in the words of God. What a lesson for the confused, depressed, and disillusioned Christians of our time. Had

Jeremiah looked around and focused on all the problems, he would have had no joy whatever. But despite what surrounded him, he “Found” something that gave him joy. We normally “Find” something only when we are looking for it. Are you looking, searching for the Lord and His word today? Or placing your hope and emotional energy in red or blue, or whatever else appeals to your fancy in this decaying world? If so, you’ll only find more confusion and depression. Start looking for the “Words” of God—in His Book. Don’t search casually or for entertainment, like a child’s Easter egg hunt. Search intently and with prayer. Search exclusively in “**Thy words.**” If you search in this way, you shall soon join Jeremiah, find the Lord’s words, and experience the glorious revival of joy in your heart.

...**for I am called by thy name, O LORD God of hosts.** The cause of Jeremiah’s joy despite his depressing world was not of this world. He didn’t find joy because his political party won an election, joy that, at best in our culture, would only last two to four years. His joy was not in anyone or anything in this decaying world. He found joy in His God and in His God’s words.

And what did God’s words communicate to the prophet? Despite all that was wrong in the world around the Jeremiah, God’s words revived something within him that gave him indescribable joy. “**I am called by thy name.**” A “Newborn babe” learns over time what his/her name is and who his/her parents are. What “Name” identifies him/her. This, my friends, is the primary function of the gospel. It does not make children of God, but it does inform and enlighten children of God who hear and believe it.

He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? (Isaiah 53:8a KJV)

Who today stands in the gap, surrounded by decay and negativity, and “**Declares**” the generation of the Lord Jesus Christ? Who preaches a message that tells attentive hearers, “You are part of the family of God. You belong to Him! You are His child!”? That is the chief purpose of gospel preaching. My Savior’s gospel is not a message of fear and threats. It is a personal message from your Savior, Brother, and Father, reminding you. “You are a child of the King! You belong to His family!”

If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious. Ah, this assuring, encouraging message clears the way for spiritual growth and healthy vitality of spirit. And that, dear friend, is God’s message to you. Tune your heart and your ears to Him and to that message. “As a newborn babe.”

Elder Joe Holder