

- 1 Peter 1:14 – 2:3
- I taught an Elon 101 class for several years a long time ago. In fact, Geoff Gentry was in one of those classes. And it was for newcomers to help them get acclimated to Elon and know how to thrive, not just survive, as students. Peter is teaching a 101 class in this text today on true holiness. Or you could even say, basic Christianity. He starts with what is an indicative, something that is settled, saying, you have purified your souls by being obedient to the truth of the gospel. In other words, now that you have been saved, and are in position to have a sincere brotherly love, then do it! And Peter then tells us what that will look like. Again, this is Christianity 101, and we will look at three main points: Live like this, Put this away, Drink this up.
- **Live like this (verse 22-23)**
- Notice the two phrases that open each of these two verses: “having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth” and “since you have been born again.” That’s the bread that holds the sandwich together. It is the good news of the Gospel, the living and abiding word of God, that is the means by which we were saved and the means by which we are being made holy. Only the Gospel, the grace of God bought by Jesus can do that. What’s in between the bread? It is the mark of true holiness, and it is what Peter commands us to cultivate: love for one another. He is not satisfied with mere tolerance or even acceptance of one another. He commands us to love. Remember when we talked about Gospel Culture at Antioch and how to grow it? Romans 15:7 was a key verse: “Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.” That kind of love is the desire and the goal of every parent with their children, isn’t it? We are not satisfied with seeing that our children just tolerate each other. Endure each other because they can’t escape the family. Not yet, anyway. No, we seek to model genuine love for each other, as husband and wife, and sincere love for our children. So they will grow in that as well. Look at how Peter describes the love we are to have for one another in the body of Christ.
- We should have sincere brotherly love. Sincere means “without hypocrisy.” Genuine. The original meaning of that word in Greek was “inexperienced in the art of acting.” Ha! If you have to act yourself into a way of feeling love toward some people, that’s better than indifference. But pray the Lord will give you the same sincere love for others that Christ has for you. Peter expands the definition when he says to love one another earnestly. Sometimes it stretches or strains us to love someone, and that’s ok. We are in good company. Earnestly means “stretched or strained,” just as Jesus was as he prayed in the garden. “And being in agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.” (Luke 22:44) If the Lord could love us to death like he did, he will surely give us grace when we are stretched and strained in love for our brothers and sisters. Peter expands the definition further when he says it is from a pure heart. We don’t have a perfectly pure heart, but part of our pursuit of holiness will mean that pride and selfishness are swept away. That makes room for love from a pure heart. Remember, “God’s law tells us to do better. God’s grace makes us better.” (Ray Ortlund) Lean into his grace. Paul wrote this to the church in Thessalonica: “Now concerning brotherly love you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another.” God has shown us through Christ the most perfect picture of love. So Paul goes on, “But we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more.” Don’t give up on love. Live like this, more and more. It is our love for one another that unites us and that grows the Gospel culture that is vital to the health of our church. The more we love each other as Christ loves us, the more the church will have a centripetal force that draws people to it, and a centrifugal force that sends us out to share that love of Christ with a world that is lost. That leads us to...
- **Put this away (verse 2:1)**

- Peter uses another form of “therefore” here. “So,” or because of, or therefore, we need to put away these five habitual sins. It is good that you are going to put on the intentional grace of loving one another. Essential to that, though, is putting off these habits that are the opposite of brotherly love. Put on and put off in order to be healthy. I compare this means of taking care of the body of Christ to the means by which we are to take care of our own body. We are to put on certain things, and we are to put off certain things. We put on good, nutritious food and good sleep and rest, and we put off inertia by being intentional with exercise. Peter says put on sincere and earnest love from a pure heart. And put off these 5 things. These five sin habits are poison in social life and deadly to the body of Christ. But by God’s grace, we can put them away, or Peter would not command it!
- **Malice.** Put away all malice. The word means “wickedness, an evil habit of the mind,” which would encompass the three words that follow it, deceit, hypocrisy, and envy. Peter used this word with a man named Simon in Acts 8, when Simon offered money to the apostles in exchange for power to lay hands on people so they would receive the Holy Spirit, as he saw the apostles do. Peter said to Simon, “May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money!...your heart is not right before God. Repent, therefore, of this wickedness (malice) of yours...” Malice is not just entertaining thoughts of hurting someone or getting revenge or committing other acts of evil, as you see in this example from Acts. It is pride and selfishness that wants a shortcut past spiritual growth to prominence and recognition. Paul said we were all once “foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another.” That’s who we were! “But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us...” (Titus 3:3-4). He saved us so we can also put away...
- **Deceit and hypocrisy.** Put away all deceit and hypocrisy. Jesus came as one full of grace and truth. No tricks, decoys, or guile should be allowed to live in us. No half-truths. No attempt through deceit or hypocrisy to promote ourselves, or to protect ourselves. We can put this away because of Christ.
- **Envy.** Put away all envy. One definition of envy is “pain felt and malignity conceived at the sight of excellence or happiness.” (Spiros Zodhiates) If we cannot celebrate someone else’s success or gifts and talents, or even their happiness, our hearts will grow more and more dark and bitter, and our love for others will become selfish and shallow. And may I say that social media has taken the opportunity for envy to a whole new level?
- **Slander.** This is an action that grows out of entertaining any of other the four sin habits which reside in the heart. Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks. Especially envy. The heart filled with envy seeks to bring others down and slander is an attempt to do that. It is spicy and hurtful gossip.
- Peter says put these away, and the language suggests taking off a dirty garment. Paul said to “put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires.” (Eph. 4:22) And “So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light.” (Romans 13:12) How do we do that?
- **Drink this up (verses 24-25; 2:2)**
- “Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation.” How do we put off habits of sin and put on love for God and one another? By the power God gives us through the nourishment of his word, which is pure spiritual milk. And great news, there is no such thing as lactose intolerance when it comes to the milk of God’s word. We are to crave it to the point of a healthy addiction. Think of a newborn baby and his or her desire for milk. If that baby is healthy there is no need to coax it to drink. It cannot get enough. Any delay at feeding time when your baby is hungry will get a swift and loud reaction! For a growing infant, milk is not an optional extra. It is the sweet and pure means by which that baby grows healthy and strong. The word of God is that sweet and pure means by which you and I grow. And unlike the flowers and the grass and our own flesh, the word of God abides forever. Our flesh fades. I track the progress of that fade every morning when I look in the mirror. Eventually our flesh fails. But the word of the Lord remains forever. And there is no

substitute for it if we are to be healthy. No novel, no newsfeed, no social media, no entertainment can replace the word, and yet it often sits on our bedside stand while we feast on that which cannot satisfy.

- What is the word of God and what does it do? Here is a small sample: It is “living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” (Heb 4:12) His word pierces through every layer of who we are. God said his word, “shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.” (Isaiah 55:11) His word never fails. The Psalmist wrote, “Your word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my path.” His word shows us which way to go. (Psalm 119:105) God said to Jeremiah, “Is not my word like fire, declares the LORD, and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?” (Jeremiah 23:29) Unlike the false prophets, God’s word will burn the straw of falsehood and break the hardest sinner’s heart. And I love the parable Jesus spoke in Mark 4 where he said “The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground. He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how. The earth produces by itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain...” (Mark 4:26-28) The word of God produces life. All by itself. We can share the seed of God’s word with someone and trust that God will water and bring life through that seed as he wills. We cannot make it happen. We can just sleep, rest, knowing that God is God. And as we read the word, or hear the word preached, that powerful seed is sown in our own hearts. And we rest, and sleep, and God changes us by his word. We don’t know how. But that’s kingdom work!
- So long for the pure spiritual milk of God’s Word, “if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.” Peter loved Psalm 34, I believe. He quotes it here and again in chapter 3. You know why? Let’s look at it and as we read it, even though it was written by David when he was on the run from Saul, think about Peter and his trials and failures as a disciple and Christ’s restoration of him. I think you will see why he might have loved it so much. Follow along or just listen as I read **Psalm 34**.
- Prayer
- Greet one another