

The Pilgrims' New Life

1 Peter 1:22–2:3

The Eighth Sermon on First Peter

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Family is everything. That's one of the well-meaning slogans of our culture. For those of us with broken pasts, fragile presents, and uncertain futures, though, it sounds too good to be true. Yet as Christians we are part of God's family. And just like it's exciting to learn something about your earthly family or to be told that you've inherited something as a member of the family, with the family of God there's something so exhilarating about it.

And here in 1 Peter the apostle is writing to us as pilgrims in this life, detached from our earthly families because of Christ, feeling as outsiders in our culture. And beginning with 1:13 we've begun to hear the imperatives of the Christian life. Peter calls us to set our hope on the coming of Christ (1:13). He calls us to be holy (1:15). He calls us to conduct ourselves in fear (1:17). Now in 1:22 and 2:2 he issues two more imperatives: love and long; love one another and long for the Lord.

He does this in the context of our new life in Christ. Go back to 1:3 with me where he praises God saying, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy he has caused us to be born again to a living hope." God the Father has given us new life as his children. And again, in 1:14 Peter

says we are the Father’s “obedient children” and in 1:17 that we pray to him. Notice this theme that we are God’s new children continues here when he exhorts us to love each other because we’ve been purified (1:22) and because we have been born again (1:23). And he exhorts us to long for the Lord like newborn infants long for their mother’s milk (2:2).

We have a new life in Christ, then, and this means we are called to two things:

1. *A Life of Loving One Another*
2. *A Life of Longing for the Lord*

May the Lord open our hearts and minds to his truth tonight.

A Life of Loving One Another

Your new life in Christ means that you are called to *a life of loving one another*. Again, the main verb here is the imperative to “love.” And he puts this imperative in the context of two other verbs that explain how it is that we can love. And what’s so powerful about these verbs is that Peter puts them in the perfect tense: they have already been accomplished and they have ongoing benefits to us. Notice how he puts in: ***Having purified your souls***—that’s the first perfect tense verb—**by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, since you have been born again** (vv. 22–23)—that’s the second perfect tense verb.

We were **purified**, meaning, we were cleansed and set apart for God. And notice how: **by your obedience to the truth**. We typically speak of believing the truth, not obeying it, but be assured that this is how Paul also speaks. For example, in Romans 10:16 he speaks of “obey[ing] the gospel” (see also 2 Thess. 1:8) and in Galatians 5:7 of “obeying the truth.” What is the meaning of speaking this way? As one writer says, it “indicates that conversion is not simply a matter of intellectual change, but of a transformation of behavior.”¹ So when we grasped hold of Jesus Christ with our minds and wills, he made us his own. Then Peter says the purpose of this consecration was that we would have **a sincere brotherly love**, what Peter calls *philadelphia*; because that’s what you’ve been given to, now **love one another earnestly from a pure heart!** Let me exhort you, beloved, that your love for each other is the mark that people will know we belong to Jesus (John 13:35).

Then Peter goes on to give the other perfect verb—**since you have been born again**—and to explain how we were born again with a quotation from Isaiah 40:

**“All flesh is like grass
and all its glory like the flower of grass.
The grass withers,
and the flower falls,
but the word of the Lord remains forever.”**

Then Peter adds the explanation: **And this word is the good news that was preached to you**. In Isaiah’s day, the people of God were wasting away like grass and flowers in the desert in their exile in Babylon but God comforted them with

¹ Peter H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), 76.

the truth that his reviving word remained and did not change.

Because we have a new life of loving one another, Peter tells us to **put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander** (2:1).

Literally, though, Peter says, “Therefore, having put away.” All our translations turn this verb into another imperative because it relates to imperative verb to long for the Lord. What Peter is saying is that when you came to Christ you were given a new life and so you have already put off the old man of sin. This is what happens with adoption. We take a child from one family or even one culture and take them as our own. Their status changes. They put all that behind and become your children, in your family, with your culture. And Peter is implying here that because we are God’s new children we need to continue putting away our old manner of life in our daily lives.² You are to love one another because the ill-will of malice, the deceit of ungodly motives, the insincerity of the unbelieving lifestyle, the envy of the world, and the slander of sin, does not belong to your new life.

A Life of Longing for the Lord (2:2–3)

Your new life in Christ means that you are called to *a life of longing for the Lord*. “Long” is the second imperative verb in our passage. I never knew what it was to long for something until I became a dad. Cyprian was so big when he was born

² Among commentators I referenced, only Davids translates it as an aorist participle: “having got rid of.” Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, 79. Contrast with J. Ramsey Michaels, who takes it as having imperatival force. *1 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary 49 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1988), 84–85. For a nuanced view of the imperatival force, see Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, The New American Commentary 37 (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2003), 97–98.

that he was so hungry. We finally had to supplement his milk with formula until the milk was enough to satisfy him. Milk can be used negatively in Scripture (1 Cor. 3:1–2; Heb. 5:13) to speak of our immaturity, but here it is used positively because milk is appropriate for sustaining new life.

And we are God's **newborn infants** so Peter calls upon us to **long for the pure spiritual milk**—why?—**that by it you may grow up into salvation**. Our children are born and they are members of our families; their status is not in doubt. In the same way when we are born again by the Father's will our status as his children does not change. So when he says that the **pure spiritual milk** causes us to **grow up into salvation** (2:2), he's not saying that we are adding to, earning, or meriting our salvation in any sense. He's saying, though, that we mature in the salvation we already have. We have been regenerated and justified and now we are growing in being sanctified as we await the day we are glorified.

So what it is that we are to long for? That's the big surprise here. In verse 1 Peter tells us to that we have already and that we must continue to **put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander**. The surprise is that he does not now give a list of virtues in contrast, but simply mentions dependence on the Lord.³ Notice that **the pure spiritual milk** is parallel to **if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good** (v. 3).

Let us love, let us long. Let us desire each other's good even as we desire our own from the Lord, whom we desire above all else. Amen.

³ Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, 81.