

Prayers

To God

Pray using the Lord's Prayer as you example and pattern of prayer; dwell on each line

For myself

Weekly theme: doing the work of the Gospel

Dear Jesus, forgive me if I do not feel I am doing what You require of me. It can be hard to work this out, when even learned preachers argue about what the Bible means and disagree about the direction of Your teaching. Come therefore by Your Holy Spirit, to speak to my heart not what I want to hear or to echo my own wayward thoughts, but to liberate me into Your divine revelation. Then, with this freedom of heart, may I have spiritual confidence in Your Word and grasp the divine truths You would implant in me so that I live as You would have me and do what You would want of me. Alleluia! AMEN

For others

As you read a newspaper perhaps on line or listen or see the news, pray immediately for those things to which the Lord leads you.

Meditation

Lord God:

As light breaks the darkness down at dawn
With ever strengthening power and awe,
Take charge of all I am this day.

As the sun moves over the sky's bright breadth
Giving meaning to this passing time,
Direct my path, reveal my way.

As each day's brightness is tempered by its shades
By layers of cloud and changing density
Keep me constant within life's changes.

As the evening declines to the evening shades
And night brings closure to the work of the day,
Grant, I pray, the rest I truly need:

For the light of Christ in my darkness gives peace.

Bible Passage

1 Peter 2:1-3

¹ Rid yourselves, then, of all evil and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and every kind of insult.
² Like newborn babies, desire pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, ³ since you have tasted that the Lord is good.

Review

This is a small text for study, but it is valuable as Peter's first words to new converts after baptism! In previous studies, we have explored the theory that most of 1 Peter is a sermon delivered at a baptism service, and we will continue to develop the idea because it enlightens our study. So here, having welcomed the newly baptised converts into the '*imperishable inheritance*' of faith (1:23) based upon the '*Word of the Lord*' which '*abides forever*' (1:25), Peter encourages them to put aside anything contrary to the new life they have received by baptism (2:1); they are now, '*newborn babies*' needing '*pure spiritual milk*' (2:2)! Peter then quotes from Psalm 34 to confirm their spiritual inheritance; '*O taste and see that the Lord is good; happy are those who take refuge in Him!*' (2:3 – see Ps. 34:8).

The idea of 'spiritual milk' is used elsewhere in scripture, notably where Paul says '*I gave you milk, not solid food, because you were not ready for it ...*' (1 Cor. 3:2), and from Hebrews '*you need milk, not solid food ... but solid food is for the mature.*' (Heb. 5:12,13). These two passages reveal that the Christian should look to partake of the Gospel 'solid food', and not continue forever with milk. Yet in this passage Peter is talking to newly baptised converts, so his call to them to '*desire*' the '*pure spiritual milk*', is obvious, and logical.

We should not think, however, that 'milk' is of less importance than 'solid food'; the basics of faith must be taken into the soul if the Christian is to grow. The 'milk' is essential first food, and this is the basic teaching of the Gospel by which the soul is saved; those who have indeed '*tasted that the Lord is good*' (2:3) know what this is. By all accounts the early church made substantial preparations for the baptism of converts and the basics of faith were rigorously taught to converts before baptism. It is likely that much of what Peter says in chapter 1 reflects this basic teaching, which the converts would have recognised.

So Peter begins his challenge to baptised converts with a forthright call to be rid of what they know to be wrong and irrelevant for the true Christian; '*rid yourselves ... of all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and every kind of insult*' (2:1). It is by purposefully feeding on the pure 'milk' of the Gospel that the Christian will '*grow up in salvation*' (2:2), and then perhaps be able to take the 'solid food' of deeper teaching. Unfortunately, many Christians today are hazy about the basics, and people who have been to church for a long time can still struggle with a course such as 'Alpha'. Peter's letter teaches us that if we want to grow in faith, we must make sure we have fed on the '*pure milk*' of basic Gospel truth.

Going Deeper

Notes on the text and translation

V2

The word 'pure' is a little strange because the Greek word 'adolos' means 'without impurity' or 'without falseness'. Strangely, this is the negative of the word 'dolos' which means 'deceit', 'guile' or 'false deed' and is used in verse 1 (see 'deceit'). It is therefore interesting to think of the word 'pure' as meaning 'without false intent or deed'.

V2

The word I have translated 'spiritual' is not straightforward, although most modern translations reach the same conclusion about what it means. The Greek word is 'logicos' (from which we get the word 'logic'), and its normal meaning is 'rational'. Literally, it means 'of the word'. As soon as I say this you will realise that something is strange if a word can mean both 'spiritual' and 'rational'! The connection is this; in Jesus' day, the word was used technically by religious groups to refer to the way they perceived the world to work. For them 'logical' did not mean something like 'mathematical' as it does for us today, and it could be a very religious concept. For this reason, I have kept with 'spiritual', which is in keeping with James 1:21 and Romans 21:1 which are the only other two places in scripture where the word is used. However, there is one other possibility for why Peter used the word, and this is explained fully in the Bible study.

V3

The first word 'since' is often translated 'if' in many versions of the Bible. This translates the small Greek particle 'ei' which can mean a wide range of things, and grammatically it is called a 'particle of consequence', so 'if' and 'since' are equally correct. I prefer 'since' because the text indicates no question about the validity of the hearers experience of God. Indeed, it is probable that Peter was addressing converts who had just been baptised.

Further Comments

Straight advice; dismiss the enemy! (2:1)

After reading this passage we are left wondering why people ask for the 'solid food' of Gospel teaching when many have not yet absorbed the '*pure spiritual milk*'! Perhaps Peter had this problem, and his words were both a proper encouragement to new converts but also a warning to those who had experienced '*new birth*' (1:23) but needed to spend more time consuming '*spiritual milk*' (2:2). His reminder about the importance of turning away from what is wrong (2:1) sounds severe, and much less warm than the appealing tone he has used in the letter so far.

The first item in Peter's list to rid oneself of is '*all evil*'. There is little doubt about what Peter means, and if we jump ahead to the end of his letter where he exhorts his readers before concluding, he says;

'... be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith ...' (1 Peter 5:8,9)

Peter has no doubt about the nature of evil, and he speaks as one who has received the Lord's personal rebuke when he succumbed himself to evil when in Matthew 16:22 we read of Peter's attempt to dissuade Jesus from going to Jerusalem. Jesus turned to him and said '*Get behind me, Satan!*' (Matt 16:23). The impact of this must have been considerable, and perhaps there are echoes of this here. Peter knew from firsthand experience that at the very moment when we are emboldened by new-found faith in Christ, Satan quickly tempts.

Other evils to be rid of

Peter identified four 'evils' as particularly pernicious to converts; deceit, hypocrisy, envy and all kinds of insult. Together they describe wrong motive, wrong action, wrong attitude and wrong speech. Deceit (Greek 'dolos' – see above) involves doing and saying things in a way which gives others the wrong impression of one's motives and intentions, and people do this in order to protect themselves or please others. For example, people have been known to convert to Christianity by doing and saying all the right things, but in order to satisfy their own motives, perhaps for power, influence or gain. This is deception.

Hypocrisy is similar to deceit and can result from insincerity or pretence, but we tend to use the word when observing that someone's words and actions do not match. The danger here is that a new Christian may be tempted to say all the right things in a church setting but live a private life which does not display the qualities of the 'new life in Christ' professed through baptism. Envy is also a threat because one who is newly baptised has to turn away from the 'old' life to embrace the new, and some may be tempted to regret what they had to leave behind, and so fall into the trap of wishing they still enjoyed what they once had. Lastly, 'every kind of insult' is the evil of allowing negativity about others to colour both judgement and words, an evil which demonstrates the very opposite of love. One who gives in to these things has quickly lost sight of the love of God by which they are saved!

Growing up in our salvation (2:2)

Having briefly but pointedly spelt out the pitfalls and problems which lurk around the corner for all new Christians, Peter then continued by calling on them to appreciate and feed on the 'pure spiritual milk' of the Gospel they had received which had led them to salvation. The same Gospel would enable them to grow and develop in their spiritual life.

In the notes above you will have read about the complexities of the word 'spiritual', which is the word '*logicos*' in Greek and has the basic meaning 'of the word'. There is one reason why Peter may have used this word to describe the pure milk of the Gospel, and this is because '*logicos*' is very similar to the Greek '*logos*' which means 'word'. In some parts of the New Testament '*logos*' is used as a title for Jesus, as you will find in the first chapter of John's Gospel; so it is quite possible that natural Greek speakers would have seen this connection and perceived that by saying 'pure spiritual milk', Peter said something which almost meant 'the pure milk of Jesus!'

Of course, a Christian, just as any person, is in a continual state of growth, and continually needs food. So the right thing to do is to ensure that appropriate food is available and consumed! It may be true to say that all of us need to continue to drink the 'pure spiritual milk'. The problems only develop if either we do not move on from there and find ourselves immature in faith because we have not taken 'solid food', as Paul commented about the Corinthian church in 1 Cor 3:2, or if we attempt to eat the solid food too soon, without having grown sufficiently through consuming the milk, as is the case in Hebrews 5:12,13.

The Lord is good! (2:3)

Peter was quite right to conclude this small section of his letter with a quote from Psalm 34 which focused his readers (or listeners) back on Jesus; 'taste and see that the Lord is good' (Ps 34:8). His appeal was straightforward. Those who had just been baptised and were beginning the journey of Christian life had just discovered the goodness and mercy of

the Lord and responded to it in faith; so Peter appealed to them to continue to feed spiritually on this same spiritual food. Baptism, the ceremony they had just experienced was focussed on Christ and His death and resurrection, and this, he said, would provide them with sufficient spiritual food for the time being, even though it was 'milk' in comparison to what would come later as they grew in Christ.

One word at the very end of our passage confirms this interpretation of the passage, and this is the word 'good'. In Greek, the word used for good is 'chrestos', meaning 'kind, loving, merciful or upright'. You can easily see that yet again, Peter is using a play on words to make his point; for by the change of one quite subtle vowel sound, you get the word 'christos' which is the name 'Christ', and Jesus Christ of course is everything that the word 'chrestos' means! Jesus Himself is the pure spiritual milk which we are invited to taste. Some of us need to be reminded that the taste of Jesus Christ is good, and it is worth drinking and feeding again from the pure spiritual food which is Christ.

Discipleship

Application

Honouring faith first known

It is easy for any one of us to say that Jesus Christ is at the centre of our faith, but in reality, this may not always be evident, and sometimes we say this without the conviction, sincerity and intent with which we meant it when we first knew Jesus and received our salvation! Sometimes our churches do not radiate the person and presence of Christ to others and have tragically become a reflection of the people in them rather than Jesus who came to save the world, and did so. You may have had the experience of attending a baptism service or a confirmation service, and being deeply moved by the faith of those being baptised and entering the Christian life. You may be touched by the Spirit to recall your own early faith and commitment to the Lord. It is like feeding on the 'pure spiritual milk' of the Gospel; it is both a refreshing and a necessary experience.

Milk and solid food

It is supremely helpful of scripture to have three references to 'milk' as the food of the Gospel. This is because one of them encourages all Christians to begin with drinking it to gain the essential sustenance of Christ, and the other two suggest firstly that we need to move on to more solid food as our life's journey unfolds and secondly that we cannot afford to stop drinking it as we journey on, whatever else happens. There is no doubt that those who are more mature in faith are immeasurably the richer if they never lose their taste for the milk; and one of the most heart-warming experiences can be to meet an elderly Christian who is as much in love with the Lord in their latter years as they were when they were younger.

Ideas for what to do

- *Find some of the elderly people in your own church and talk to them about what Christ means to them, and how He has guided them over the years.*
- *Pray against the arrogance by which people give the impression that they are more advanced and mature in faith than others; and pray that all God's people might receive the appropriate sustenance for their spiritual needs.*

Questions (for use in groups)

1. What Christian teaching would you associate with the idea of 'spiritual milk'?
2. Discuss how it is that we 'rid ourselves' (2:1) of all wickedness and deceit etc. How do they raise their heads within your church?
3. How can a preacher declare the solid food of the Gospel when the congregation are a complete mixture of those who need spiritual milk and those who want 'solid food'?

Final Prayer

Gracious Lord, who sent the Messiah, our Lord Jesus Christ, into the world to bring about the Heavenly Kingdom of God and defeat all evil; so work in my life that I may show the fruits of repentance, and live my life in a manner worthy of my call; I ask this in the name of Jesus Christ. AMEN