

Prayer

Walk with us on the pathway of this day dear Lord;
Open doors before us and lead us where we should go,
Close doors behind us so that we do not go back.

Place your hand on us to correct us when we wander,
Speak to us regularly lest we presume to know your will.

We ask because we love You, and give You all our praise: AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Pastors

Pray for pastors who are in trouble, physically with illness, mentally with stress, or spiritually with oppression or battling with the enemy. Pray God's blessing into their lives.

On-going prayers

- *Pray for the nation of China*
- *Praise God for the joys of family life and the bonds of love*
- *Pray for all who suffer bullying or stress in the workplace*

Meditation

When the glory of a day lived with You fades within the memory, and the evening casts its shadow over all the work, the eating, the conversations, the excitement, the disappointments, the challenges and the opportunities of the day; then O Lord,

Speak Your word of truth that we may hear it,
And heal our hurting bodies where we need it:

Correct our faulty thoughts when we could do with it,
And cheer our flagging spirits because we long for it:

Bless us by Your mercy for we are lost without it,
And grant your Holy Spirit, that we may receive it:

Save us body, soul and spirit, though we don't deserve it,
For indeed; You are our Saviour, and we mean it!

Bible Study - 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 very small text for our study, but it stands on its own at the beginning of this chapter of 1 Peter as the first exhortation given by Peter to new converts who had been baptised. If you have followed previous studies you will by now know the theory that most of 1 Peter is a sermon preached at a baptism service, and in this case, what Peter says here certainly fits the picture. Peter has 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), and now encourages them to put aside what is wrong and contrary to the new life they have received (2:1). He addresses them as 'newborn babies' and suggests

that they feed on 'pure spiritual milk' (2:2), quoting 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' from which the Christian feeds is found elsewhere in scripture, noticeably in 1 Corinthians 3:2 where Paul says 'I gave you milk, not solid food, because you were not ready for it ...' It is also found in Hebrews where it says 'you need milk, not solid food, for everyone who lives on milk ... is a child. But solid food is for the mature.' (Heb. 5:12,13). If you read these two passages you would gain the distinct impression that in both letters it is implied that the deeper things of God are to be found in the 'solid food' of God's word which should be the adult diet of the Christian, and not milk. This is the way in which the expression is commonly used today with reference to Christian teaching. Christians are known to talk about substantial teaching as 'solid food', for example, and use it as a compliment to a teacher or preacher.

We would be wrong, however, to imply that the milk is either less important or somehow 'shallow' in comparison to the 'solid food', and it is today's passage from 1 Peter which helps us regain a balanced view of this matter. Peter talks very positively about the 'pure spiritual milk' which is necessary for young Christians, and it is clear from the next verse that the spiritual milk is indeed 'the Lord' who has been 'tasted' (2:3). The point is well made that the Christian diet of milk is basic teaching about the Lord Himself, and Peter calls for baptised converts to receive and rejoice in the pure spiritual milk they have been fed. He does so because he knows very well that just like a baby which must grow on milk before it is weaned, a Christian must grow on pure teaching about Christ before being weaned onto the solid food of more in depth spiritual teaching. Our text invites God's people to rejoice in the 'milk' because like Christ Himself it is fundamental to Christian belief, faith and practice.

The evidence is there for us all to see that whilst many clamour for the 'solid food' of Christian teaching, both this and the 'pure spiritual milk' are required for a balanced diet. Indeed, not all have yet fed sufficiently on the milk, for it is not hard to find evidence within the life of the church of the very things Peter denounces; the evils which should have been dismissed from the heart of a Christian long since (2:1). By speaking in this way, Peter shows his concern for the problems of the whole church, not just the baptised converts to whom he spoke, and we must remember that both 'milk' and 'solid food' are expressions used by the writers of the New Testament to make points. The power of scripture lies in the Word and in Christ revealed, rather than a literal use of the examples used!

Going Deeper

There are a number of words in this text which read perfectly well in this translation, but are not exactly what they seem. In order to go further, we will look at these and explore the complexities within this text. Of itself, this passage offers us some 'pure spiritual milk' which is clear teaching about Christ, but it also offers us 'solid food' which is appropriate for our consumption when we have fed sufficiently on the milk!

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.*

Straight advice; dismiss evil! (2:1)

Perhaps the worst danger for the church is not that it does not have enough 'solid food', but when its members have not drunk deeply enough of the 'pure spiritual milk'! Certainly, Peter is of that opinion, because in the middle of his description of the 'new birth' (1:23) and 'spiritual milk' (2:2), he reminds his listeners sharply of all that is contrary to the Faith. The words he uses sound severe, given the warm and appealing tone of the letter so far, so Peter must have had a number of things in mind when he said 'rid yourselves ...' (2:1) and then listed evils which destroy basic faith.

The first thing Peter mentions here 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 spoke as one who had received the Lord's personal rebuke when he had succumbed to evil himself at the point of what should have been his highest triumph as a disciple. We read in Matthew 16:22 that after Peter had proclaimed Jesus to be the Messiah, he had tried to dissuade Jesus from taking the road to Jerusalem and His death. Jesus turned to him and said 'Get behind me, Satan!' The impact of this must have been considerable, and perhaps there are echoes of it here, for Peter knew from firsthand experience that at the very moment when we are emboldened by new-found faith in Christ, Satan quickly tempts.

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.

Application

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.

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.

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'?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

I hope that I keep to my own advice within this study; I certainly aim to do this. I have been greatly blessed by those Christians who are more mature than I who have testified in the most simple and powerful ways about the saving work of God in their lives. The elderly in faith have an essential part to play in the mission of the church; they just need to share their faith!

Ideas for discipleship programme

- 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.

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