

Excerpts from Life-study of 1 Peter, Message 16

GROWTH IN LIFE AND ITS RESULTS (2)

Bible Verses:

1 Pet. 2:2-3 As newborn babes, long for the guileless milk of the word in order that by it you may grow unto salvation. If you have tasted that the Lord is good.

1 Pet. 2:5 You yourselves also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house into a holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

Peter charges us to long for the guileless milk of the word that by it we may grow unto transformation. We do not grow unto outward correction or outward adjustment or outward improvement. On the contrary, we grow unto inward transformation by life and in life.

Peter begins 2:2 with the words “As newborn babes.” The word “newborn” indicates a living organism. A newborn babe is living and organic. As such newborn babes, we need to drink the guileless

milk of the word. Then the milk will afford us living, organic nourishment. Spontaneously the life within us will work together with the nourishment of the milk so that we may grow. However, if we did not have a living, organic element in us through regeneration, the nourishment in the milk of the word would not have any effect, for there would not be any cooperation on our part.

In 1:23 Peter says that we have been regenerated. In 2:2 he urges us to be as newborn babes longing for milk. Both regeneration in 1:23 and the newborn babes in 2:2 point to the same matter—regeneration with the divine life. This regeneration is the base for our growth in life and for the purification of our inner being. We all have within us the divine life that we received in regeneration as the basis of all spiritual growth. In order to grow and be purified, we must have this base. Therefore, as newborn babes, we should long for the guileless milk of the word so that by it we may grow unto transformation.

In verse 3 Peter continues, “If you have tasted that the Lord is good.” The Lord can be tasted, and His taste is pleasant and good. If we have tasted Him, we shall long for the nourishing milk in His word. The

Greek word rendered “good” in this verse also means pleasant, kind.

Peter was certain that the ones to whom he was writing had been regenerated. But he was not sure that they had tasted the Lord. For this reason he says, “ If you have tasted that the Lord is good.” It was certain that the believers were newborn babes, but as verse 3 indicates, some of them may not have tasted that the Lord is good. Today millions of believers have truly been regenerated, but a great many have never tasted that the Lord is good.

The tasting of the Lord is not in outward miracles. Rather, it is in the inward nourishment of life. No matter what kind of environment we may be in or what kind of circumstances we may have, we are sustained by the Lord. We can say with Paul, “I can do all things in Him who empowers me” (Phil. 4:13). We can stand the test of both riches and poverty, of both pleasant circumstances and difficult, because we do not care for the outward situation but for the inward nourishment. This inward nourishment is the genuine tasting of the Lord. In these verses Peter indicates that if we have tasted that the Lord is good, we shall surely long for the milk in the word.

In verse 4 Peter goes on to speak of Christ as a living stone: “To whom coming, a living stone, having been rejected by men, but with God chosen, held in honor.” The Greek word rendered “coming” can also be translated approaching, drawing near, coming forward.

In verse 4 Peter makes a leap from the milk of the word to the living stone. There does not seem to be a bridge or any other kind of connection between the milk and the stone. First, Peter indicates that the Lord is the milk and the word for nourishment. Then he goes on to speak of Him as the living stone.

According to verse 4 , we need to come to Christ as the living stone. But what is the way to come to Him? We come to the Lord by drinking the milk of the word. Have you ever realized that when you are drinking milk from the word, that is your coming to the Lord? What is the milk in the word? That milk is the Lord Himself. Therefore, when we drink the milk, we come to the Lord. Do you have some other way of coming to the food you eat? What is your way of coming to the food? Do you not come to it by eating it? We all come to the food by eating it. The same is true with respect to coming to Christ as the living

stone. In verse 4 the word “coming” is equal to drinking. Therefore, when we drink the milk, we come to the Lord.

We have pointed out that Peter seems to leap from the milk-Christ to the stone-Christ. This implies that the milk becomes the stone. How can this be? With us, this is impossible, but it is not impossible with the Lord, because He is all-inclusive. As the all-inclusive One, Christ is milk, and He is also the stone. We are not able to exhaust all the aspects of Christ. He is the milk, He is the bread, and now we see that He is the stone. According to 2:6-8 , Christ is not only the stone for building, but also the stone for stumbling and grinding. Even as the stone Christ is all-inclusive: He can build us, or He can cause us to stumble, and even grind us.

We need more experience of Christ as the milk and the stone. In the morning we should drink Christ as milk from the Word. Then during the day the process of transformation should take place within us. In the evening we should come to the church meetings and fellowship with the saints. This is building. Here we see that in the morning Christ is milk, and in the evening He becomes the stone. During the day the

milk does a transforming work within us to produce a stone.

Those who do not experience Christ as milk may like to be scattered or independent. The elders may visit them and encourage them to come to the meetings. However, these saints do not want to attend the meetings. One such brother once said, “As long as certain persons are in the meeting, I do not want to attend. I don’t want to see their faces. I don’t like to attend the meetings simply because they are present.” But after a time the Lord did something in this case. This brother repented of his attitude toward the particular ones involved. Then he began to have a desire to drink the milk of the word. Because of his drinking the milk, he longed to come to the church meetings. Eventually he was fully reconciled with the saints for the sake of the building.

First the Lord is milk to nourish us. Through the nourishment in the milk of the word, transformation takes place. Then we have the building, where the Lord Himself is the stone. This is the reason that in chapter two we first have the milk and then the stone.

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Note: This version is not intended to be printed as material for pursuit during the small group gathering. Instead, it is to be used as additional reference for brothers and sisters who want to prepare in advance for fellowship on the message. We include here notes from the commentaries of the brothers in the life-study radio program. The points from these commentaries can help enrich our understanding and, eventually, our fellowship with the saints on the selected portions of the life-study message. We still recommend that, if possible, the saints still listen to the [audio message](#) in addition to reading the [life-study message](#) for personal pursuit and for preparation for small group gatherings. We also wish to point out that these notes have not been fully polished.

Introduction

[CW]: At times, the Apostle Peter's way of writing in his New Testament epistles seems very strange. Though his content is quite high, he breaks many rules of composition by mixing metaphors and awkward use of grammar. For example, in chapter 2 of 1 Peter, he describes the spiritual nourishment in the Word of God by comparing it to the nourishing milk of a nursing mother for her newborn babe. But then, without any apparent transition, the metaphor changes to Christ being a stone for the building up of God's house. Well, as a work of literature, we might have ground to criticize Peter, but as a conveyor of rich spiritual content, we'll see today that Peter's writing is full of the divine thought and deep experiential enlightenment. Bill Lawson has joined us for our program today. Bill, it seems that each time we come to Peter, so far in this life-study of 1 Peter, we realize, yes, he was maybe an uneducated fisherman by his natural training and background, but something of the divine economy, the divine thought, and the divine experience has really been wrought into him that comes out so marvelously, haven't we?

[BL]: That's really so, Chris. I really enjoyed your word concerning Peter in your introductory word. Of course, Peter's background is not one of a high degree of education, and if you compare him to Paul, there's no comparison, yet Peter, it's amazing, although he did not have the education as a background, he has some marvelous, profound things to say in the divine revelation that we really need to get into and see in this program.

[CW]: I think this chapter, or at least these first few verses in chapter 2, really illustrate this as we're going to get into them today. In 2:2, he says, "As newborn babes, long for the guileless milk of the word, in order that you may grow unto salvation." In a program yesterday, we touched this matter of the guileless milk and the effect that it has on the guile that's within our being, and it's really our salvation, so it gives more meaning to this phrase that you and I were talking before the program today, Bill. I have to believe this phrase puzzles many believers, doesn't it, that you may grow unto salvation. What a concept.

[BL]: Really so, again, because the concept of most believers is that salvation is just once and for all. It's a salvation from hell, it's a salvation from sins, and once we are redeemed by the blood of Christ and we enjoy His rich salvation, that's it, salvation is over. But as we'll see in this program and in the future weeks, salvation has many different phases. There's initial salvation, there's a progressing kind of salvation, and even there's a consummating kind of salvation.

[CW]: Yeah, which we saw in chapter 1, verse 9, when Peter talks about the salvation of our souls, there is a kind of a—well, it incorporates both this progressive aspect that you touched on and also the consummating aspect, doesn't it?

[BL]: Right. I mean, to be saved is not a small thing, as most believers realize. We are initially saved in our spirit when the Lord's life comes into us, but our soul and our body has not been saved yet by any means, so we need to grow in the divine life, so our soul may be saved. And then eventually, when our soul is fully saved, that will bring about the full salvation of our physical body, which the Bible calls glorification.

[CW]: Well, these are the stages of salvation. There are aspects of salvation. There's, of course, what Witness Lee liked to describe, especially later on in his ministry, as a judicial aspect. This is what is commonly thought of as the initial salvation, where the record of sin is dealt with, where objectively, before a righteous and holy God, we are found to be righteous in Christ, and our sins are removed, as far as the east as the west. This is the objective salvation, and it's a marvelous aspect. But in Peter's writing, the emphasis clearly is on the other aspect, which we could call the organic, the living, the day-to-day salvation, not just from the record of sin in the heavens, but really from the nature that we have by our natural birth, and that's the road we're going down today, isn't it, Bill? All right, let's join Witness Lee in today's wonderful word on the nourishing milk in the word.

Part 1

[CW]: Bill, he points out here in verse 23 of chapter one, near the end of the chapter, he brings in this matter of regeneration, having been regenerated. Any way you look at it, this is an organic term, isn't it? It really implies the imparting of life.

[BL]: It sure is. In fact, in that first chapter there, you have regeneration in the first couple of verses, and then in verse 23, again, Peter makes it very clear that you believers have been regenerated. That is a life matter, like you mentioned earlier, Chris. It's an organic matter. When we were saved and born again, God's divine life was imparted into us, making us newborn children of God. It's an organic matter. It's a life matter. We received a divine life, a divine element into us when we first called on the name of the Lord Jesus. And Peter's burden here is really that we would grow and mature in that divine life, that we would grow unto salvation, and we have to be saturated by this divine life.

[CW]: Bill, I'm going to ask you to do something maybe related to your own personal background and experience. Contrast this thought with, let's say, the thought that you had as a young believer, you know, just freshly saved and reading Scripture, come to a verse like this. What would this convey to you, grow unto salvation?

[BL]: In my background, particularly, Chris, of course, I would read this verse as being saved from hell, God's judgment, God's condemnation from my sins and so on. And then after that, I don't know how I would look at this verse, because in my background, salvation was a once and for all thing that happened once, and that's it. But Peter here is much deeper than that. He's not so superficial here. After we receive the Lord's life, we have to grow in this life. And the more we grow in this life, the more we're saved from so many negative things. We're saved from not only our sins, we're saved from worldliness, we're saved from our natural ambition, we're saved from independence, we're saved from ourselves, we're saved from losing our temper, we're saved from argument, we're saved from a host of things by enjoying this rich, divine life.

[CW]: The Apostle Paul makes this same point. As you said, maybe stylistically they were different, and as it turns out, much more of the New Testament record was flowed from the pen of the Apostle Paul. But in thought, by this point in Peter's life, they are really on the same line, the same track. In this coming portion, Witness Lee is going to refer to a verse, I'd like to quote it, he doesn't give the reference when he just refers to it by thought, but in Philippians 4:13, Paul writes, "I am able to do all things in him who empowers me." And again, here we're talking about this kind of salvation, not just from an eternal destiny without God, an eternal destiny we don't even like to think about, but we're talking about a very practical daily salvation, aren't we, even in Paul's writings.

[BL]: It's a daily salvation, and we need a moment-by-moment supply, as Brother Lee puts in one of his footnotes, to save us from daily things. It's not just a salvation once for all, but daily we need to grow in this salvation. We receive the divine life, we need to grow in this divine life, and enable us eventually to mature in this divine life.

And as you say, Chris, this is the same thought as Paul had. Paul also, in his 14 epistles, he talks about salvation very much like Peter does.

[CW]: Let's add the next verse in Peter's writing in chapter 2 to the context here of our portion just ahead. It says, if you have tasted that the Lord is good, and Witness Lee will point out at the beginning here that Peter is also fond of adding new thoughts or qualifiers, and that's surely what we have here, tasting that the Lord is good.

Part 2

[CW]: Bill, I think all of us have experienced in our Christian life periods of time when the Word of God may be very dry to us. Just honestly speaking. It's difficult for us to find time to read it. We make excuses not to read it. And it just doesn't seem to draw us in. At other times, it becomes sweet to our taste. It becomes something we begin to long after. And here, he really connects it, doesn't he? The longing is connected to, first, our tasting of the Lord. How important is this in our approach to not just Bible reading, but to Christian life as a whole?

[BL]: I think many times in our most trying situations, we may have a deeper longing for the Word of God to taste it than even during times when things are going okay. I was considering the background, Chris, of this epistle. Peter here is writing to the Jewish believers who were scattered. They were really undergoing tremendous persecution. And Peter is trying to minister life to them because being a Jewish believer, they were persecuted by everyone, even their own kinfolk who were not real believers. So Peter is really trying to bring those Jewish believers back to a real longing for a tasting of the Word of God, that they would continue to follow the Lord, not shrink back to Judaism or the past, but to continue on with the Lord. And he's trying to bring an incentive into them in that if they would long for this guileless milk of the Word, they could grow unto salvation, and eventually they would really learn to take the Lord in, in good situations, bad situations, and all kinds of situations. We also need to be those that need to turn the Word that sometimes is dry into something living and fresh. And that comes mainly through prayer, praying over the Word and praying with the Word to turn the Word into something living that can nourish us and supply us.

[CW]: So if I understand, Bill, both what Witness Lee is saying here and what you are confirming, when the Lord becomes so real to us, not just, again, outwardly, objectively, but within us, to the point that we are tasting Him, tasting His sweetness, tasting His preciousness, that affects our own desire, love, appreciation, and longing for the Word, which then, of course, nourishes us. And it becomes a kind of a cycle, doesn't it, that propels us in our Christian living.

[BL]: It really does. I was considering, too, Brother Lee wrote a number of hymns which he really talks about newborn babes longing for the Word, coming to the Word in a rich, simple way. These are also very helpful. Many times when we come to the Word or we come to sing hymns, we sense we're like a babe. We're just craving, we're longing for this guileless milk. And it's, like you say, more a subjective experience. We're not so much outwardly, but inwardly, we're being nourished, we're being fed. All that the Lord is in His Word is being worked into us and being ministered into us to bring us through any kind of situation.

[CW]: Now, Bill, in this coming portion, I want to bring us to the transition that I referred to way back in the opening word. Because in verse 4, it's very striking. We've been talking now about regeneration, this organic aspect of salvation, organic aspect of the Christian life, and the nourishing element of the milk of the Word as newborn babes. And then all of a sudden here, verse 4, Peter says, coming to Him, or in the King James, I believe it says, to whom coming a living stone rejected by men, but with God chosen and precious. What a transition, Bill. From the milk in the Word, which we've been coming to the Word, but now he says, we're coming to this stone. Let's join Witness Lee as he tries to unravel this apparent contradiction.

Part 3

[CW]: Well, Bill, as we pointed out in the opening word, Peter's writing may not satisfy the literary critics, but it surely matches our experience and really presents us with some marvelous spiritual truths here. We've had this experience, haven't we? We don't touch the Lord. We don't get in the Word. And the thought of coming together with other believers and experiencing real fellowship, it's just not what we're looking forward to, is it?

[BL]: That's right. It's never going to happen. Brother Lee's expounding here. It's just marvelous how he opens up these few verses here in 1 Peter. As he got into it, I was reminded of, again, back to Paul here. I'm comparing Peter to Paul. If we read Paul's epistle to the Corinthians, 1 Corinthians 3, Paul has the same thought here. He talks about we believers being God's farm, God's cultivated land, which is something botanical. And then, right, the next phrase he says, God's farm, God's building. And you wonder, Paul, how could the farm become a building? How could something botanical become something mineral? And it's the same process, the process of transformation, where we enjoy the Lord, preferably in the morning. Then that life element that gets into us when we get into His Word, when we drink His Word, when we pray over His Word, that element, Chris, works in us, right? It operates in us during the day. It carries away a lot of the natural things in our life, and it brings in another divine element. And as that goes on and operates, then what happens spontaneously, we want to be with others. We want to come together with others, hopefully in the evening or other times with other believers and share our enjoyment of Christ with them. Then when we share our Christ with them, they share their Christ with us. This is a building going on. So you have this seed there mentioned in the first chapter, the incorruptible seed that regenerates us. That's the botanical life. And then you have the stones in verse 4. That's the mineral life. So there you have the transition there from something botanical to something mineral by the process of transformation.

[CW]: It's all throughout both the writings of Peter, the writings of Paul. Peter calls us babes. We're about to see in the coming verses in program tomorrow and beyond that he calls us living stones. You also as living stones. So the transformation process that you just described so well is just saturated in Peter's writings and as you pointed out as well through Paul's writings and even in John's writings and Revelation and his epistles. So this is the divine thought in the New Testament, isn't it?

[BL]: It really is. I also enjoy here Brother Lee's talking about coming to the Lord. Many times we say, how can I come to the Lord? He's invisible and I don't see Him. I can't feel Him. Where is He? But when we come to His Word, Chris, I think we realize, wow, we realize the Lord is there. And then we begin to soak in His riches, absorb Him, and then something metabolic starts to take place in our Christian life. And then we want a fellowship with other believers, and then we begin the building process. And we become, as you say, the stones. The Lord is the stone, and by enjoying Him, we become the living stones just like the Lord.

[CW]: Wow. Bill, this is good stuff. I look forward to having you back again. Of course, I realize you're on your way out of the country for a couple of weeks to blend and be with believers in Russia. So I pray that the Lord would really, of course, keep you safe, but also bring you into full and rich enjoyment as you're there with Him. And we'll look forward to your return and you'll join us again at that time.

[BL]: It's a real pleasure to be here around the Lord's Word.

[CW]: Amen.

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