

Peter's Epistles #32

A Challenge to Grow Spiritually

1st Peter 1:22-25

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1st Peter 1:22-25

(22) Having now sanctified your hearts by means of obeying the truth, love one another resolutely so that your brotherly love may be without hypocrisy. (23) [For you] have been born again not from corruptible seed but through the Word of God which lives and abides forever. (24) Because [as it says (Is.40:6b; 40:8)], "All flesh is like grass, and all of its glory is like the flowers grass produces. Grass dries up and its flowers fall to the ground. (25) But the Word of the Lord abides forever." This is the Word of good news which has been given to you.

Introduction: Before proceeding to the exegesis of the individual verses, it should be pointed out that the overarching theme of these four verses is the need for believers to continue the good approach and procedure that led to salvation after being saved in order to grow, progress and produce for the Lord. We have now been made holy in God's eyes, have been sanctified, by the truth – positional sanctification (saved by grace through believing the gospel), and it behooves us hereafter to proceed with our Christian walk in the same way: pursuing *experiential* sanctification through believing and applying the same Word of God, so that our behavior in our walk with Christ and our production in serving His Body the Church might be in accord with the wonderful position we now have as those who are "in Christ".

The same seed of the Word which saved us is the very Word of God to which we must now continue to give our close attention to fulfill the Lord's will for our lives. For everything else in this world which is not the truth will be done away with, but the Word of God abides forever. We too shall abide forever with our dear Lord because we have been born again through that same Word of God – and we will enjoy forever the rewards we have won through continued attention to and application of the Word in our lives after salvation.

But with respect to the progress you have made, keep on advancing in the *same way* (i.e., through receiving, believing and applying the truth)!

Philippians 3:16

(6) So then, exactly as you [originally] received Christ Jesus as [your] Lord, be walking in Him [in the very same way], (7) rooted and built up in him, established in the faith just as you were taught, overflowing with thanksgiving.

Colossians 2:6-7

Sanctified hearts: We have seen before that sanctification and holiness (theological synonyms) are all about separation from sin and evil. God is perfect and absolutely separate from sin and evil, and so it behooves those who are called by His Name to be so as well. We are sanctified, made holy, in a *positional* way when we believe in Jesus Christ. When we are born again, God considers us holy, sanctified and set apart from the world as those who now belong to Him and His Son forever. Naturally, at the point of salvation we are not divested of the sin nature which infests our present, temporary bodies. For that reason we will not be completely free of sin in fact until "this corruption puts on incorruption" at the resurrection (1Cor.15:53). The fulfillment of that blessed hope at the return of our dear Lord will constitute our *ultimate* sanctification when we will be forevermore absolutely holy just as our Lord is.

In between salvation and eternity, here in the devil's world, it is incumbent upon every believer to "pursue sanctification" (Heb.12:14), "perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2Cor.7:1 NKJV). This is called, theologically, "experiential sanctification", the day by day pursuit of holiness in which every believer in Jesus Christ ought to be engaged.

As we have seen before, however, this holiness we are to develop and manifest to the world is not merely a matter of appearances; it cannot be merely an act or as our passage puts it "hypocritical" as it was for the Pharisees in the past and is today for all manner of legalistic groups (hypocrisy, a Greek derived word, means, etymologically, "play-acting"). Rather, true sanctification is the development of a life pleasing to the Lord arising out of a genuine love for Him. Further, we have also seen that such real sanctification (as opposed to merely apparently "holy" behavior) cannot be achieved simply by working on our outside – in the manner of the Pharisees whom our Lord called "whitewashed tombs" or in the manner of legalistic groups which eschew only certain obvious behaviors (which may not even be sinful in some cases) while not really changing the inner-man. Genuine, godly sanctification and true holiness can only be developed from the inside out, never from the outside in. To be truly holy, we have to walk very closely with the Lord Jesus Christ, and that is only possible through spiritual growth, through learning the truth of the Word of God, through believing it with all our hearts, and then through applying it in the Spirit to our daily walk. This is why Peter makes a point here in verse twenty-two of specifying *the place* of true sanctification, "*your hearts*", and also *the means* by which the recipients of his letter had already done so: by "*obeying the truth*", namely, because only by changing on our inside, in our hearts, are we pursuing genuine sanctification, and this can only be done by learning, believing and applying the Word of God and its truths to our lives.

(14) I have given them Your word, and the world hated them, because they are not of the world just as I am not of the world. (15) I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you protect them from the evil one. (16) For they are not of the world just as I am not of the world. (17) So make them holy (i.e., "sanctified") *by means of Your truth – Your word is truth*. (18) And just as you sent Me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. (19) I am consecrating Myself for their sake, so that they too may be made holy (i.e., "be sanctified") *through truth*.

John 17:14-19

All who originally heard Peter's letter read to them were no doubt believers, and so at the very

least they had had their hearts sanctified *positionally* when born again. But that is not the end for believers in this life. We are left here after salvation for a purpose, and it is for this reason that Peter exhorts his readers on to the next phase of the Christian life, spiritual progress in our walk with the Lord through the fulfilling of the greatest commandment, that of love (1Cor.13:13).

Love one another resolutely so that your brotherly love may be without hypocrisy: As our Lord tells us in Matthew 22:36-40, the entire Law and all the prophets hang on the greatest commandment, namely, to love the Lord with all of our hearts; He also tells us in that same context that the second commandment – essentially its counterpart – is loving our neighbors (preeminently our fellow believers) "as ourselves". In his exhortation here to virtuous love, Peter puts the emphasis on our love for our brothers and sisters in Christ (i.e., *philadelphia*, "brotherly love"; clear also from "love *one another*") rather than on our love for the Lord. That is because, as his fellow apostle John tells us, "whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen" (1Jn.4:20 NIV). If we are going to manifest the primary virtue of loving the Lord with all that is in us, loving our brothers and sisters in Christ is an absolute prerequisite.

This love for one another, our fellow believers in Christ, should not be and really cannot be just an act, just for show, performed only in hypocrisy. To make it clear that a large part of what he means by this is that genuine love for our brothers and sisters in Jesus cannot be mere passive lip-service, Peter adds in his command for us to love one another that we do so "resolutely" (Greek: *ektenos*, or "stretched to the limit"). It may appear loving to say to someone in need, "depart in peace, be warmed and filled!" (Jas.2:16), but as James tells us there is "no profit" in such empty words. So what Peter is telling us here is not so much how to handle our attitudes towards our fellow Christians (although that is certainly a part of it); his real emphasis in giving us this exhortation is focused on having us "put our money where our mouth is", so to speak. In the example from James, this would mean actually *helping* a brother or sister in material need.

For the most part, however, the most effective service we give our brethren is through the proper employment of our spiritual gifts . . . so that the Body of Christ may function in the way in which it was designed to do, with each part supplying to the other whatever is lacking. There are, most definitely, many types of gifts and many combinations of gifts, not to mention even more varieties of ministries (and we should never allow ourselves to think only in terms of what is deemed acceptable in this regard by the traditional church visible). So while all believers should give (when able and to whomever is genuinely in need), and pray, and encourage (e.g.), each of us has a special sphere of ministry picked for us by Jesus Christ Himself, one which syncs perfectly with the combination of gifts we have received from the Spirit, and whose effects are ordained by the Father (1Cor.12:4-6). And what all this means when considered in the context of our chapter is that there is a corresponding need for continued spiritual growth and progress in order to get to the point where we really *can* love our brothers and sisters in Christ in an effectual way by helping them through ministering to them. By emphasizing the culmination of our process of Christian progress – the point where we actually are manifesting a resolute and non-hypocritical love for all other believers – Peter thereby implicitly encourages us to do everything we need to do in order to get to that blessed point: growing up through the truth of the Word of God, progressing in our walk with Christ in passing the tests that come through the application of

that truth, and so finally getting to the point of being able to help others as we institute the ministries for which we have been placed on this earth and gifted by the Spirit. That is the point where we can truly begin to fulfill the greatest commandment to "love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind" (Lk.10:27 NKJV; cf. Deut.6:5; Matt.22:37).

Born again not from corruptible seed but through the Word of God which lives and abides forever: In the parable of the Sower, our Lord likewise compares the Word of God to a seed. In that parable, the Word either sprouts (in those who respond to it) or does not (in the case of unbelievers who do not respond); and for those who do respond, the seed may wither (those who fall away from the faith), or it may be choked by weeds (those who allow worldly concerns to inhibit any spiritual growth, progress and production), or it may fall onto good soil and produce an abundant crop (those who respond to the Word *after* salvation so as to continue with the truth until the end).

Speaking to believers, Peter reminds his readers that the Word of God, specifically the good news about salvation in Jesus Christ through faith in His person and work on the cross in taking away our sins, is the means by which they entered into their relationship with God, and now encourages them to keep embracing that same Word of God going forward. Just as the eternal seed of the Word of God is far superior to corruptible seed which is of no benefit in eternity (even though it has a worldly purpose), so also all of our worldly, physical concerns, while they may be of some necessity here and now, will not matter in eternity. We accept that fact when we receive the truth of the gospel with joy and believe in the first place; we should continue to hold fast to that principle and "keep on advancing in the same way" (Phil.3:16), namely, by giving our attention to the Word of truth after salvation as well. For that is the seed which "lives and abides forever". Our present flesh and all that we may have in this world is like "grass" which is here today but gone tomorrow. But we have a better hope than the vanity the world beholds. We know that just as the seed by which we have been reborn is incorruptible and eternal, so also we will enjoy eternal life in an incorruptible body when our Lord returns. That is "the Word of good news which has been given to you" (1Pet.1:25). Knowing this, namely, that the things we see are ephemeral but that everything related to the Word of God and our status as children of God by virtue of being born again to Him and through Him by that same Word when we believed it are eternal (2Cor.4:18), there is thus every reason for us to be consistent in learning, believing and *applying* that same Word as long as we are still alive, to be diligent in "loving one another resolutely and without hypocrisy" so as to honor our Lord and earn a full reward. That is "the Word of good news which has been given to you".

That Peter uses here an attitude (love) to express the totality of Christian application is something that should be lingered over a bit. The only way to accomplish the mandates God has given to believers after salvation is through consistent attention to the truth, a spiritual object, not a material one. It's primary fruit, once we have grown through it by hearing it, learning it, believing it, and become consistent in applying it is also primarily spiritual, even though there are material aspects and applications to our Christian lives. In using this analogy of the physical seed versus the seed of the Word, Peter makes the point quite clearly that it is the spiritual which counts in this process (just as it was when we believed), not the material (Jn.6:63). Material

ministry is important, not only towards believers but also in evangelizing unbelievers. But everything material is going to be destroyed. So it must be remembered that even in terms of ministries which have large material components, without the spiritual aspect, without, that is, the truth, they are nothing. For the essence of all true ministry is *the truth*. In terms of believers, genuine ministry towards our brothers and sisters in Christ has as its primary purpose to provide them with the truth (as in the teaching of the pastor-teacher) or the means and opportunity to get it (e.g., support for a teaching ministry) and/or use it (e.g., encouragement, and in some cases physical assistance too so that others may learn and grow and minister in turn, once physical needs have been met). That is, critically, also the case in terms of ministering to unbelievers as well. No amount of medical care, charity, or other material assistance is going to have an eternal benefit for any unbeliever – not unless it is also accompanied by the truth of the Word of God in the gospel message of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

Born again: There are many ways to express the blessed status we believers have as those who have been saved through faith in Christ. As Peter says at the beginning of this passage, our lives have now been "sanctified", meaning that God has set us apart from the world and has made us specially separate from it as those who belong to Him. But while sanctification teaches our salvation through the principle of exclusion (from the world, death and damnation), rebirth teaches that same salvation through the principle of inclusion: we are now members of the family of God Himself, sons and daughters of the Father by virtue of belonging to His one and only Son, our dear Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We were dead, but now have been made alive forevermore and given an eternal life, waiting to be revealed in full when our dear Lord returns for us.

The "sanctification of life" (sanctification of a positional and, one hopes for us all, also a growing experiential nature) Peter had just told his readers about is theirs (and ours) "through obedience to the truth", and the goal of that positional and ever-growing behavioral holiness, we remember, is "resolute love for our brethren without hypocrisy", that is, a genuine, heartfelt and determined attitude of helping or ministering to our brothers and sisters in Christ that they may grow and progress in the faith through the truth of the Word of God, and then, ideally, come into their own ministries as well. That is to say, the Lord's purpose in setting us apart has to do not only with our own salvation but also and integrally with our purpose in this life after salvation, expressed by Peter through reference to the cardinal Christian virtue, love (where we recognize that loving our fellow Christians is essential if we are also to love Him with all our hearts and souls and minds and might). Peter's point here in linking sanctification by means of the truth (v.22) with having been born again through the imperishable, everlasting Word of God in the gospel (vv.23-25) is to remind us of and to focus us on the eternal perspective. We are sanctified – holy in God's eyes; and we have been born again – alive now to God as beloved children of God. This is truly "good news" which belongs to us as those who have accepted the truth of the gospel and have become members of the true Church of Christ through faith in Him and what He has done for us in atoning for all of our sins.

But the story does not end there. We were sanctified for a purpose: growth, progress and production (wherein we demonstrate our "brotherly love"). Likewise, we are born again, made alive by God to Him and made one with Christ, for precisely the same purpose. After all, it was

not corruptible seed that gave us birth, seed of this world which is here today and gone tomorrow. No. We have been born again "through the living and abiding Word of God" (v.23), and so, as Peter desires us to conclude, our actions in this temporary world have eternal consequences. For that reason our lives are not about looking backward to the day when we were saved (although that is a wonderful day and really the *only* day worthy of remembering), but of looking forward to the day when we shall stand before our dear Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. And while the contemplation of that eternal future, when we will likewise be incorruptible and eternal just like the Word of truth through which we were reborn, should fill us with joy and longing (Rom.8:23), it should also occasion a good and godly apprehension regarding our future evaluation before the judgment seat of Christ (2Cor.5:10-11). Being sanctified, therefore, brings with it an obligation – to make the most of the Christian life we have been given. Being born again is likewise not the end but the beginning, for we have not been given mere physical life, as if the seed that gave us birth was temporary; we have been given eternal life through an incorruptible seed, the everlasting Word of God from Him who is the very Word of God, our dear Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. And just as the seed of truth which we received with joy so as to be born again is spiritual, incorruptible, eternal, so also our priorities in this life after salvation ought to be fixed on spiritual things, incorruptible things, eternal things.

(1) Therefore since you have been resurrected [positionally] with Christ, strive for the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. (2) Think on the things above, and not the things on the earth. (3) For you are already [positionally] dead [to all that], and your [true] life has been hidden away with Christ in God. (4) When Christ – your [true] life – is revealed [at the 2nd Advent], then you too will be revealed in glory.
Colossians 3:1-4

Let us therefore determine to live our present lives in the light of the eternity where our true lives are hidden away in Christ, that He may be pleased with us on that great day to come, and that we may hear "Well done, good and faithful servant!" from the One we love so much more than this temporary life.

(15) Do not be a lover of this world, nor of what is in this world. If anyone is a lover of this world, a [genuine] love for the Father is not in him. (16) For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. (17) The world and its lust are passing away, but whoever does God's will is [going] to stay [alive with God] forever.
1st John 2:15-17

Conclusion: Before getting into the specifics of spiritual growth in the following chapters, along with the related subjects of handling testing, and ministry, here at the conclusion of chapter one Peter takes the time to remind us as Christians how we were saved and what our basic attitude towards life should be: one lived in the light of eternity from the divine and heavenly perspective, and not in accordance with an earthly and worldly viewpoint. That is very important, inasmuch as it is very easy in all the noise and confusion of this world for even very advanced Christians to become distracted at any point in our day by day walk with the Lord and focus too much on our personal problems and on the texture of our life here on earth, losing sight of the "big picture", namely, the plan of God and our proper role therein. And it is also important to remember, as

made clear by Peter through his contrasting of earthly seed with the eternal seed of the Word of God, that this is a *spiritual* fight, not a material one.

(3) For though we may walk in the flesh, we do not make war according to the flesh. (4) For the weapons of our warfare are not fleshly, but are powerful for God, for the destruction of strongholds.
2nd Corinthians 10:3-4

Just as the eternity and its rewards we look forward to in resurrection are at present invisible, so also the carrying out of the true purpose Christ has for our lives is likewise first and foremost spiritual, and merely makes use of physical resources to carry out our spiritual objectives. As long as we are here on earth, we do "walk in the flesh" – but not according to it (Gal.5:16-25). Our fight is a spiritual one waged with weapons which cannot be seen by fleshly eyes, gifts of the Spirit empowered by the Father and directed by our Lord Jesus Christ for the betterment of all who call upon His holy Name. "This is the Word of good news which was given to you" (v.25).

The world and its lust are passing away, but whoever does God's will is [going] to stay [alive with God] forever.
1st John 2:17

The world will never appreciate or understand us. Indeed, it cannot. For we are serving a higher calling, one which cannot be seen with fleshly eyes, one given to us by the Son of God Himself. In this world we may be subjected to all manner of tribulation (Jn.16:33), and we may be certain that those who have chosen for the world and its evil ruler rather than for the One who died for the sins of the entire world will never accept us as anything but fools (1Cor.1:18; 2Cor.6:14). But to us, believers in Jesus Christ the Lord, the only thing that really matters – the only thing that *should* matter – is pleasing the One who died in our place.

(16) Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. (17) For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. (18) So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.
2nd Corinthians 4:16-18