

***A PEOPLE OF THE WORD***  
**1 Peter 1:22-2:3**  
**October 26, 2008 – Grace Covenant Baptist Church**

*REFORMATION DAY – sola Scriptura!!!* The doctrine that the Bible alone is the ultimate authority was the “Formal Principle” of the Reformation. In 1521 at the historic interrogation of Luther at the Diet of Worms, he declared his conscience to be *captive* to the Word of God saying, “Unless I am overcome with testimonies from Scripture or with evident reasons—for I believe neither the Pope nor the Councils, since they have often erred and contradicted one another—I am *overcome* by the Scripture texts which I have adduced, and my conscience is bound by God’s Word.” With Scripture alone as the sure foundation, the Reformers affirmed that justification is by grace alone, received through faith alone because of Christ alone for the glory of God alone.

This “Formal Principle” is expanded upon in the Protestant Confessions of Faith that came out of the Reformation. The Second London Baptist Confession of 1689 is reflected in *The Charleston Confession of Faith*, the first Southern Baptist confession that we have adopted as our confession. It opens as follows:

The Holy Scripture is the only sufficient, certain, and infallible rule of all saving knowledge, faith, and obedience.

**The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man or church, but wholly upon God who is truth itself, the author thereof; therefore it is to be received because it is the Word of God.**

The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down or necessarily contained in the *Holy Scripture*; unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelation of the *Spirit*, or traditions of men.<sup>1</sup>

It is the theme of *sola Scriptura* that Peter addresses in our text. As we examine these verses, we have what I consider to be an unfortunate chapter break. We believe that the Word of God was inspired by God. Each and every word was literally breathed out by Him and is the final source of revelation given to man and is the all-sufficient rule for faith and practice. The verse and chapter divisions were later interjected to help us better grasp the meaning of this Word, to provide a flow to help our understanding and intake of the Scripture. These verse and chapter breaks, however, are not inspired by God. While there is a break given between chapters one and two, I believe it interrupts the flow of Peter’s thought. There are some key words that tie the end of chapter one to the beginning of chapter two. This will become evident in the outline I have provided to help us see that *those who are truly born again begin with the Word and continue with the Word*. It is this very thought that Peter suggests: that those who are in Christ are a people of the Word.

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<sup>1</sup> *Charleston Confession of Faith*, Chapter 1.

## **I. The Evidence of the New Birth – “Obedience to the truth” (1:22; 2:1)**

As we have seen over the past few weeks, Peter gives a series of imperatives that will mark the life of a believer, of those who have their hope in Jesus Christ and His saving merits. The first three speak to the inward attitude of the believer. They are to have a hope that is fixed on the grace of God (v. 13); they are to behave with holiness (v. 15); and they are to conduct themselves in the fear of God (v. 17). As the believer lives according to these commands, they will be sanctified inwardly. But this sanctification will manifest itself outwardly towards others in the body. This is what Peter considers in the fourth of these imperatives. Christian’s are to **“fervently love one another from the heart.”** Peter shows how this love is accomplished both positively and negatively.

### **1. Put on love (1:22)**

Peter here shows that love for the brethren is the goal or the purpose of conversion. It is not something that is already accomplished, but something that the believer is actively engaged in by faith throughout their life on this earth. Peter suggests that this is something that will take place in a Christian, **“Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love for the brethren.”** This purification is a moral cleansing, not a ritual cleansing. It is an inward cleansing, a cleansing of **“the heart,”** not external cleansing that Peter has in mind.

This idea of cleansing or purification is captured by the Psalmist.

**Psalm 24:3-5** – <sup>4</sup> Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? And who may stand in His holy place? <sup>4</sup> He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not lifted up his soul to falsehood and has not sworn deceitfully. <sup>5</sup> He shall receive a blessing from the LORD and righteousness from the God of his salvation.

**Psalm 51:6-10** – <sup>6</sup> Behold, You desire truth in the innermost being, and in the hidden part You will make me know wisdom. <sup>7</sup> Purify me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. <sup>7</sup> Purify me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. <sup>8</sup> Make me to hear joy and gladness, let the bones which You have broken rejoice. <sup>9</sup> Hide Your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquities. <sup>10</sup> Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

The great preacher Charles Haddon Spurgeon had the following comment on the purification of the heart set forth by David in Psalm 51:

*You desire truth in the innermost being.* Reality, sincerity, true holiness, heart fidelity, these are the demands of God. He cares not for the pretence of purity, he looks to the mind, heart, and soul. Always has the Holy One of Israel estimated men by their inner nature, and not by their outward professions; to him the inward is as visible as the outward, and he rightly judges that the essential character of an action lies in the motive of him who works it. *And in the hidden part You will make me to know wisdom.* The penitent feels that God is teaching him truth concerning his nature, which he had not before perceived. The love of the heart, the mystery of its fall, and the way of its purification—this hidden wisdom we must all attain; and it is a great blessing to be able to believe that the Lord will “make us to know it.” No one can teach our innermost nature but the Lord, but he can instruct us to profit. The Holy Spirit can write the law on our heart, and that is the sum of practical wisdom. He can put the fear of the Lord within, and that is the beginning of wisdom. He can reveal Christ in us, and he is essential wisdom.

Such poor, foolish, disarranged souls as ours, shall yet be ordered aright, and truth and wisdom shall reign within us.<sup>2</sup>

How is it that the Lord makes us to know this wisdom? How does one gain truth in the innermost being? Peter states that this purification takes place in connection with **“obedience to the truth.”** Edmond Hiebert states concerning this **“obedience,”** “Obedience” is a compound noun in the Greek, literally meaning “under the act of hearing.” It conveys the thought of actively listening to an authoritative pronouncement and then submitting to it in obedience. It is an obedience that springs from hearing in faith.<sup>3</sup> So what Peter suggests is that one who is truly born again, who has by faith submitted to the wonder of the gospel, will continue to be purified by that same gospel. The gospel truth will always have an obedient affect in those who truly know Him. This **“obedience to the truth”** is demonstrated by the natural proclivity one has in **“a sincere love for the brethren.”**

The Apostle John captured this truth that the believer will demonstrate their profession is true in their love for the brethren. Twice in John 15 gives Jesus own words. **John 15:12** – “This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you.” **John 15:17** – “This I command you, that you love one another.” John then shows the significance of this love in tying it to the love of God in **1 John 4:19-21** – <sup>19</sup> We love, because He first loved us. <sup>20</sup> If someone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. <sup>21</sup> And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also.

So Peter here reminds his readers that an evidence of the new birth is that one continually puts on love and demonstrates this love sincerely towards his fellow believers.

## **2. Put off unloveliness (2:1)**

Conversely, or negatively, the believer is to put off anything that is unloving, namely spiteful actions towards others that demonstrate a love for self rather than love for others. This is shown in 2:1, a verse that completes Peter’s thought that love is an evidence of the new birth. He gives five things that the believer is to **“put aside”** or “put off,” all inward marks of a wicked selfishness rather than a godly selflessness.

First, the believer should put aside **“all malice.”** In general terms, this means to put aside all wickedness of any kind. However, in this context, Peter has in mind a specific meaning. It refers to the basic attitude of ill will or injustice towards others that disrupts the harmony in the believing community. It is an attitude that is eager to injure one’s neighbor for one’s own gain. Peter says this has no place in the life of one who is truly born again and called to demonstrate love towards others at all times.

Second, **“deceit”** is to have no place in the believer’s heart. This refers to a premeditated act of trickery or falsehood. It is an effort to twist and distort the very truth that they have been and are to continue to be obedient to in an effort to somehow put oneself in a better position. Of course, this deceit is most clearly demonstrated by the father of lies in the Garden of Eden. There we see Satan twist and distort God’s truth in an effort to deceive Adam and Eve. He casts doubt upon the truthfulness of God’s Word and boldly sets forth a blatant lie veiled with the truth, just enough truth to make his lie believable. That describes a heart that is deceitful.

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<sup>2</sup> Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*, “Psalm 51,” <http://www.spurgeon.org/treasury/ps051.htm>, accessed 10/25/2008.

<sup>3</sup> D. Edmond Hiebert, *1 Peter*, 112.

However, as one lives in obedience to the truth, this truth is what drives them, not their inclinations of deceptiveness. As one demonstrates love towards others, their heart is that others would live according to God's truth, not distortions of that truth. All deceitful actions must be put aside.

Third, **“hypocrisy”** must be put aside. A hypocrite is one who puts on a false appearance. In Greek times, an actor in a stage play would wear a mask as he portrayed a part to hide his true identity. Likewise, a hypocrite is one who gives an appearance, who masks his true identity. He appears to be one thing outwardly but quite another inwardly. He is a man who does not have a pure heart, but has a double heart, a deceptive heart. Jesus rebuked the Pharisees and the scribes, “You hypocrites, rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you: ‘THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME’” (Mt. 15:7-8). This describes hypocrisy, to say one thing but to live another. **“Hypocrisy,”** Peter says, has no place in a sincere love for others.

The fourth thing that must be put aside is **“envy.”** Instead of desiring the best for others, **“envy”** hopes for the downfall of others for one's own advancement. **“Envy”** has been called the running mate of hypocrisy. As hypocrisy has its spring in claiming to have the good we lack, envy seeks to deny and defame the real good of others.<sup>4</sup> Proverbs 14:30 warns, “A tranquil heart gives life to the flesh, but envy makes the bones rot” (ESV). **“Envy”** then has no place in a loving heart for others because it desires what another has so much it leads to spitefulness and holding a grudge. Peter says, “Put aside all envy.”

The final vice that has no place in a loving heart for the brethren is **“slander.”** This refers to the speech that denigrates or runs down another. It deliberately assaults the character of another and usually takes place behind a person's back. It goes hand in hand with gossip, again as a means to promote or advance one's standing. This can take place, and often does, in the life of the body. Sometimes it can come in the form of pious prayer requests, “Dear God, we know that so and so needs to...” Regardless of its form, **“slander”** seeks to tear down another person's character for one's own benefit. This, Peter says, has no room in a purified heart that seeks the good of others before self.

So the evidence that one has truly been born again is that they seek the good of others in reaching out to them in love at all times, putting off any of these hindrances, and others, that would disrupt the life of the body. All of this is in **“obedience to the truth”** of the gospel. How can one who has truly experienced the love of Christ do anything but love the brethren selflessly? Those who have the love of Christ in them will love others.

## **II. The Means of the New Birth – “the living and enduring word of God” (1:23-25; 2:2-3)**

Having established the fact that those who live in obedience to the truth demonstrate it by their love for the brethren, Peter then reminds his readers of how this new nature comes about.

### **1. The beginning of spiritual life (1:23-25; 2:2-3)**

Peter begins by establishing the fact of their new birth, **“For you have been born again.”** Here he expands on his opening thought in 1:3 and their initial regeneration by showing the abiding results. As Hiebert suggests, “In regeneration, God works to implant a new nature, and that new nature motivates the development of moral purity in life. The Christian is alive by a creative act and lives by a continuing creative miracle.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> William Kelly, *The Epistles of Peter*, 117; from Hiebert, 122.

<sup>5</sup> Hiebert, 114.

Peter then describes the source of the new birth that begins this spiritual life. It comes **“not of seed which is perishable, but imperishable.”** The seed out of which physical life springs is **“perishable,”** subject to decay and destruction. It can only give life that is also subject to decay. Spiritual life, on the other hand, springs from seed that is **“imperishable”** and gives a life that is also imperishable, not subject to decay or death. Peter had already touched on this truth in 1:4 and 1:7. The believer’s hope is in that which is **“imperishable”** because that is the seed that he is born out of.

Peter then describes that seed as **“the living and enduring word of God.”** The Word of God, particularly the gospel, is the source of the new birth. The Word of God is incorruptible. Here Peter has in mind the purifying effect of the gospel. **“Living”** suggests the power of the Word as seen in **Hebrews 4:12** – For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. **“Enduring”** shows the permanency of the Word and the new life generated by it.

Peter reinforces this truth by quoting Isaiah 40:6. That which is born of natural seed may appear beautiful for a time. Grass and flowers show their beauty in the spring and summer. Leaves show their beauty in the fall. But then comes the winter. The grass goes dormant, the flower fades, the leaves fall, and the trees have no signs of life. But not so with the Word of God, which endures forever. The work that God’s Word does is not here today and gone tomorrow.

But not only does Peter show the source of spiritual life as the Word of God, he also provides the means that this Word is applied by the Holy Spirit to the heart, **“And this was the word which was preached to you.”** Peter sets forth the necessity of the preaching of the gospel for new life to begin. This was the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ. Paul spoke to this in Romans 10:14-17:

**Romans 10:14-17** – <sup>14</sup> How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? <sup>15</sup> How will they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, **“HOW BEAUTIFUL ARE THE FEET OF THOSE WHO BRING GOOD NEWS OF GOOD THINGS!”** <sup>16</sup> However, they did not all heed the good news; for Isaiah says, **“LORD, WHO HAS BELIEVED OUR REPORT?”** <sup>17</sup> So faith *comes* from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.

When one receives the truths of the gospel, these truths take up residence in their life. Thus we see the importance of receiving a steady diet of gospel preaching. The preacher has the responsibility to proclaim the truth and nothing but the truth, trusting that the Spirit of God will apply that truth and only that truth to the lives of others in regenerating power. That is why Paul proclaimed that his message was to preach Christ crucified, nothing more, nothing less.

## **2. The continuation of spiritual life (2:2-3)**

Having established the source and the means of how spiritual life begins, Peter then exhorts his readers to continue to live plumbing the depths of God’s rich Word. **“Like newborn babes”** ties in with the new birth, of having been **“born again” (v. 23)**. Just as a newborn baby is totally dependent on the mother for physical nourishment, so must the believer remain in dependence on the Word of God, longing for **“the pure milk of the word.”** Peter is not speaking of immature

Christians, but of those who understand that this milk is the very substance of spiritual life. It contains all they need to grow and progress in their spiritual lives.

However, this milk is to be **“pure milk,”** it must be uncontaminated. I will never forget the time that I carried Kirby to breakfast one morning before school. She ordered milk to drink with her meal and upon taking a drink quickly spat it out. I, being the all-intelligent father, took a drink to check it out. The milk was rancid, having set overnight in a cooler without power. I can attest to the fact that there is nothing worse than contaminated milk. But milk that is pure is desirable and to be longed for. That is what Peter suggests will mark those who have truly been born again. They will continue to be nourished by the Word of God. As they do so, they will be able **“to grow in respect to salvation.”**

Peter then suggests that the believer is to examine themselves on this matter, **“if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord.”** Hebrews 6:4-6 serves as a warning to those who presume upon Peter’s exhortation to continue longing for the Word of God.

**Hebrews 6:4-6** – <sup>4</sup> For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, <sup>5</sup> and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, <sup>6</sup> and *then* have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame.

There is a warning to those who do not long for the Word of God. Peter’s argument in our text is that those who have the imperishable seed planted in their hearts will demonstrate it in their love for the brethren and in their longing for the Word. Their spiritual life is evidenced in good deeds toward others and by growth in their salvation. They understand the words of the psalmist, “O taste and see that the LORD is good; How blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him!” (Ps. 34:8).

## **Conclusion**

We have seen from our text this morning that *those who are truly born again begin with the Word and continue with the Word.* I close this morning with a few points of application concerning the Word of God that will help us to cherish God’s Word see that it is “more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold; Sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb (Ps. 19:10).

### **1. Hear it<sup>6</sup>**

The most important way is hearing it preached each and every time we meet. Prepare yourself to listen.

But there are other ways: radio, cassette tape/CD/mp3 recordings.

“Faith *comes* from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ (Rom 10:17).

### **2. Read it**

Surveys have shown that today nearly twenty-five percent of professing believers never read their Bibles. Only twenty percent claim to read any part of it daily. Of course, the argument usually is, “I don’t have time.” Dear friend, find time! I had a little quip on the bulletin board in my college dorm room that said, “If you’re to bust to spend time with God today, then you’re too

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<sup>6</sup> From Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life.*

busy.” You simply cannot live a holy life without feeding your soul daily on the pure milk of the Word.

I suggest having a set time and place that you routinely sit down to read through the Word of God. Have a specific plan that will help take you through the entire Bible at the very least in a year. I consider this time to be fruitful for a general knowledge of God’s Word and for understanding how it all fits together. Many plans exist to guide you in this way. After reading it, think about it, mull it over in your mind. From the section you read, what questions do you have? What stood out to you? What could you consider for further study?

### **3. Study it**

The difference between studying and reading is a pencil and paper. Jot down your thoughts and questions. Have a good study Bible that you can look to study notes to help (ESV Study Bible, Reformation Study Bible, MacArthur Study Bible). Have a commentary or two that is not too technical (Welwyn Commentary Series, EP; Preaching the Word Series by Kent Hughes; Let’s Study Series by Banner of Truth; MacArthur Commentary Series).

### **4. Memorize it**

This is the best way to internalize God’s Word to live a life of holiness and stand against the schemes of the devil. Yet, if only twenty-five percent read the Scriptures daily, what percentage do you think are engaged in memorizing it? Anyone memorize Scripture, it simply is a matter of time and discipline. I encourage you to pick up a copy of Andy Davis’s *An Approach to Extended Memorization of Scripture*. It will help you get started and help overcome discouragement. A good plan is the *Fighter Verses* provided by Desiring God Ministries free on their web site.

Those of you who are creative might draw pictures to help you remember what you memorize. This helps form a mental picture of God’s Word. (EX: Ps. 119:11)

Have accountability. When is the last time you asked someone to hold you accountable and actually reviewed your verses?

### **5. Meditate on it**

### **6. Apply it**

*Thomas Watson* – Take every word as spoken to yourselves. When the word thunders against sin, think thus: “God means my sins;” when it presseth any duty, “God intends me in this.” Many put off Scripture from themselves, as if it only concerned those who lived in the time when it was written; but if you intend to profit by the word, bring it home to yourselves: a medicine will do no good, unless it be applied.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Whitney, 57.