

Has My Soul Been Purified by Obedience to the Truth?

by Richard Owen Roberts

The sermon emphasizes the importance of obedience to the truth and the purification of the soul in order to experience revival and live in unbroken fellowship with Christ.

Duration: 1:11:56

Scripture: 1 Peter 1:1-2

Topics: "Obedience"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of what we think about and how it impacts our actions. He refers to Philippians 4:8-9, which lists six things that we should think about. The preacher also emphasizes the need for purity of heart and obedience to the truth. He encourages the audience to avoid slander, evil speaking, and hard language. The sermon concludes with a reminder of the precious blood of Jesus Christ that redeemed us and the importance of preaching the Word of God.

Transcript

We often wonder, what does the Lord think of the churches of America? One of the advantages of being old, there are plenty of disadvantages, obviously, but one of the advantages is you remember what it used to be like. And I can assure you, it used to be an awful lot different than it is now. We were never really a very good people, but by God's grace we were a lot better than we are now.

And while we've had those in the church for hundreds of years that were really unbelievers, they were pretty well labeled for what they were, and it was understood by genuinely Christian people what kind of reprobates they were. But today, it's all mixed in together, very hard to distinguish the true from the false. We had lunch with a couple today that was expressing their burden about their sister who's been swept off her feet by this new but old nonsense of universalism, that God is so much a God of love that everybody will end up in heaven because once they stand before God, they're going to realize how dreadful their mistake was and they're going to repent and everybody's going to believe.

And millions and millions are embracing all of these nonsensical viewpoints, and the sad thing is all this has been passed by us before. And in former generations, we had the wisdom simply to say, that's garbage, let's stick with the word of God. But today, multitudes are throwing away their spiritual opportunity by feasting on the husk of false doctrine so prevalent.

A pastor told us when he came in that he had spoken this morning on the subject of hell. I only know one subject less popular than hell, and that's sin. Now, sin is only popular or unpopular when you speak against it.

It's very popular in terms of behavior, but I've so often thought we talk about revival. I wonder how many here even know what revival is all about. But in trying to help congregations in various places to understand what revival really is, I've said focus upon the most wonderful thing that can ever happen to a person.

The psalmist in the 73rd Psalm spoke of this in a very powerful way by making this singular statement, the nearness of God is my good. And people like myself who've been around and been preaching for over 60 years have time after time realized the immense truth of that statement of the psalmist. The nearness of God is our good.

When you talk about revival, there are two things of very great importance. Number one, God himself draws near. That's what makes revival so marvelous and also what makes it so urgent because God is not near us today.

He has purposely distanced himself because he hates sin. He's intolerant of all the sloppy teaching so popular in the church and of all the grievously wicked living that takes place. But I've also, speaking in terms of the nearness of God as a marvelous aspect of revival, mentioned that the other element of revival that is so truly consequential is in seasons of true revival.

The word of God itself spreads like an incredible flood, a tsunami, if you please, a wave of divine blessing that passes before our eyes and sweeps untold multitudes into the love of Christ and into the kingdom of God. Nowadays, unlike the way it used to be, I rarely ever see a tear on a single face when the preaching is most biblical and searching and touched and empowered by the Spirit. Almost nobody weeps.

Whereas years ago, it was not uncommon to see entire congregations, sometimes very large congregations, overwhelmed with conviction and shame and sorrow and open weeping and confession of sin. We rarely see that anymore and we desperately need those two incredibly urgent things, the nearness of God and the word of God itself empowered by the Holy Spirit in a wonderful, fresh way and sweeping across the land. But one doesn't really speak fairly if they speak only in the realm of the positive.

I've asked people very often, what would you think the most wonderful part of heaven is? It would be interesting to have your viewpoint. Well, sometimes a person will say, Oh, I think it'll be marvelous to be somewhere where the streets are paved with gold. My word, I can slip and fall on concrete.

I don't need golden streets. Well, I'm not speaking against golden streets, but frankly, that's no allure. If that was the attraction of heaven, I would prefer not to go there.

Others think, well, in heaven there's no night. Well, I don't find that very encouraging. My wife Maggie lives with me.

We have this little quiet pact between ourselves, this understanding. The last person in bed at night is responsible for putting out the lights. Now, I want to say this kindly, but she's a little on the slow side.

It doesn't take any effort on my part to be in bed before her. And many a night I've called out, Maggie, hurry up and shoot out the lights! And it's wonderful when the darkness descends. When you've had an

extremely busy month and you're worn nearly to a frazzle to have the blessed darkness come.

So again, if the allure of heaven is no night there, there's going to have to be some major change in me before I really appreciate that. Now, heaven gets more interesting when you begin to talk about the people who will be there. I have a great fondness for some of the preachers long gone.

I've written a great big thick book entitled Whitfield in Print. No one in their right mind would read it because it's not a reading book, but a reference book, an annotated bibliography. But it's all about a great friend of mine whom I never met.

And I have hundreds of those men from history that I've read about and I'm looking forward. Won't it be wonderful to sit down in heaven next to, say, Jonathan Edwards and spend 18 years just asking him questions? And when we personalize it and begin to talk about heaven as a place where those that we have known and loved have gone before us, then it begins to get very, very encouraging and heartwarming. I look forward to being with my mother and my father again.

But even so, that's not the great attraction of heaven. To me, the most phenomenal thing about heaven is that heaven is a place where we will live in unbroken fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, we don't know anything about that here because we have a season of wonderful fellowship with Christ, then we do some stupid and wicked thing.

Sin separates us for a season, maybe only hours, maybe days, before we come to true repentance. But our relationship with Christ is broken by our own bad conduct and often by the extraordinary busyness with which we get caught up in life. So heaven is a place of unbroken fellowship with Christ.

That is such an allure, that nothing is too great a price to pay for knowing that we shall spend eternity with the one that we truly love the most. But having said that, you really, just to be fair to truth and to scripture, have to ask the question, what's the worst part of hell? Perhaps the pastor spoke of this this morning. In your mind, what is the absolutely worst aspect of hell? The fire that never goes out? The worm that never dies? The reign of evil that surges forward? The devil and his angels, every rotten, reprobate, every cursed individual throughout all of eternity there, and you are plunged into the middle of the greatest kind of that which is filthy and corrupt.

I believe the most grievous aspect of hell is precisely the opposite of the most wonderful aspect of heaven. There are two words, or three words I should say, that will never be spoken in hell. It will never, ever be said in hell, it is finished.

For it never will be finished. A hundred million years of grief and sorrow and pain and separation from God has just begun. So heaven, the unbroken presence of God, and hell, the unbroken absence of God.

Now there is a certain sense in which we are what we believe, the things that we think greatly impact what we do. I spoke at Grace this morning on those wonderful words in Philippians chapter 4, verses 8 and 9, six things that we must think about. And then a pattern of what we must do.

And I said at the beginning of the message this morning, what we think about does very much determine who we are and what we do. And if we allow ourselves to think things that are untrue, we become untruthful. If we think about things that are not lovely, then we kill the spirit of love in ourselves and we fail at being wonderful magnets of love that inspire love and grace in others.

Now this evening I'd like to draw your attention to a passage in 1 Peter. On Wednesday nights for some months we've been looking at 1 Peter in our Bible class, and I was especially stirred and moved by the passage we will focus upon tonight, but it just seems so appropriate for our time together this evening. So 1 Peter, please, chapter 1. I want to read the chapter and go on a bit into chapter 2 and then focus upon the last four verses of chapter 1 and the first three verses of chapter 2. So 1 Peter 1, verse 1. Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, that you may obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with his blood.

May grace and mercy, peace be yours in fullest measure. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God, true faith, for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while if necessary you have been distressed by various trials, that the proof of your faith being more precious than gold, which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

And though you have not seen him, you love him. And though you do not see him now, but believe in him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls. As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful search and inquiry, seeking to know what person or time the spirit of Christ within them was indicating as he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glory to follow.

It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but you in these things which now have been announced to you through those who preach the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look. Therefore, gird up your minds for action. Keep sober in spirit.

Fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lust which were yours in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior, because it is written, you shall be holy, for I am holy. And if you address as father the one who impartially judges according to each man's work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay upon earth, knowing that you are not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with the precious blood as of a lamb, unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ.

For he was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you, who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory. Let your faith and hope are in God. Now we come to the text of the evening.

Verse 22, Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart, for you have been born again not of seed, which is perishable, but imperishable, that is, through the living and abiding word of God. For all flesh is like grass, and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers and the flower falls off, but the word of the Lord endures forever.

And this is the word which was preached to you. Therefore, put it aside, all malice and all guile and all hypocrisy and envy and all slander, like newborn babes long for the pure milk of the word, that by it you

may grow in respect to salvation, if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord. That's a very powerful passage, and one that I believe is very urgent and necessary for the situation in which we find ourselves.

Honestly, I don't have any idea what's going to happen in terms of this proposed marriage. I don't know what you feel about it. I don't even know what our people feel about it.

It's just something that we're supposed to explore and to see what the Lord says concerning it. But certainly, in a situation such as what we're cultivating, there's a great deal of room for violation of the principles of this passage. The will of God could be prevented from occurring by some mean spirit in me, or in you, or in somebody else.

But there is something here so wonderful and helpful that no matter what comes of our conversations together, I believe we can profit immensely from the truths that are set forth in the portion between 1.22 and 2.3. Now, the fact with which the passage opens, since you have, in obedience to the truth, purified your soul, you need to ask with great care and integrity, has that happened? Each of us has to keep asking that question, has my soul been purified by obedience to the truth? Well, we look around us, in the church world in general, and we know you could never say anything like that about the church in general. You know, we get all of these amazing statistics that pass before us. Whether there's any accuracy or not in the statistics, we most certainly don't know.

But I've heard statistics like this. The sin rate in the church is almost identical to the sin rate in the world. There are two areas of exception.

Among those who call themselves born-again Christians, there is a higher percentage of those who have divorced and remarried than there is in the world. Is that true? I don't know. I know all men are liars and statisticians are not excluded.

But it looks to me like it might very well be true. But just let that sink in. The sin rate in the world, virtually the same as in the church, with the exception that among those who call themselves born-again Christians, there is a higher divorce and remarriage rate.

The other area of exception is, it is said, I don't know that it's true, it is said the homosexual rate in the church among professed born-again people is higher than it is in the world. Well, if there's any truth in either of those statements, it's quite obvious those people cannot talk about having purified their souls by obedience to the truth. But they're not here and we're not talking to them.

We're here. And we're talking to ourselves. And we all have to honestly ask the question, has my soul been purified by obedience to the truth? Obviously, every Christian is required to obey the truth.

And clearly, the passage makes it absolutely certain, our souls are purified as we obey. I find that one of the most useful questions to ask people who are church attenders but who do not seem to have any right relationship with Christ on an ongoing basis, this simple question, where do you disagree with God? And it's amazing, really, how many people have known disagreements with God. They say they're Christians.

They even sometimes say they're totally surrendered. But you ask them where they disagree with God. It's a useful question because most people haven't heard it and they don't have any automatic answer for it.

I remember asking that question sometime back in the state of Colorado. There was a very clear sense of the presence of God in this week of meetings where I had been preaching. And it was growing very late

one evening.

And I had counseled with a number of people who seemed to be touched by the Holy Spirit. And then the pastor came walking down this long aisle. He said, there's a woman in the back who is very, very upset.

Something is troubling her. But I've been totally unable to help her. Would you be willing to speak with her? So I said, yes, pastor.

Bring her down here to the front. Well, as this woman was walking down the aisle with the pastor, I said, Lord, the pastor couldn't help her. I can't help her unless you help me.

So he introduced her to me. He sat down on the front bench. And I said to her, where do you disagree with God? She looked at me with a horrified expression on her face.

That's an awful thing to say to me. I said, answer the question. Where do you disagree with God? She said, I'm shocked that you would ask such a thing.

This is not my church, but I've been the organist in my church for 40 years. I really love God. How can you say that to me? I said, I understood that you needed help.

I do. Then I said, answer the question. I don't disagree with God.

I said, you most certainly do. Now tell the truth. And she said to me, well, I do love the world.

And we turned to Matthew 6. And I showed her how impossible it is to love both God and man and the world. But multitudes have some disagreement with God. Do any of us? That's a question we have to ask, because this passage is all based upon this preliminary statement, this fact.

You have purified your souls by obedience to the truth. Now then, it states the result of this fact being true. The result of having purified your souls by obedience to the truth is a sincere love of the brethren.

Now for some of us, that means there are certain people in the church that we're close to. And we sincerely love them. But now we're being faced with the possibility of loving some people we don't really know.

And they haven't been in the same kind of a church situation that we have. And we're not really all that sure even that a sincere love of the brethren. Obviously the key word is who are the brethren that it's speaking about.

Is it speaking about those within our little intimate fellowship with whom we're quite close? Or is it speaking of something vastly broader and more consequential than our own local fellowship? Now he makes it quite clear that this sincere love of the brethren must be loving one another fervently from the heart. But we need to ask the question, what kind of sins make it impossible for us to sincerely love the brethren? We'll come further along in terms of who this word brethren refers to in a few moments. But just for the moment, let's focus on the question.

What kind of sins make it impossible for us to fervently love the brethren? Well obviously the sin of pride. Because when you allow pride to occupy your heart, you then feel it's legitimate to question whether so and so is truly your brother or your sister. Now we've been very clever and good at that.

In our denominational settings, in our local church focus, we have had the tendency to think, well maybe some of them are brethren, but they're not advanced Christians like we are. That's one of the questions that's being asked at great. Are these people as serious as we are? And maybe, is it possible somebody here has been wondering something along the same line? Pride is a huge barrier to loving the brethren.

You can't even love your own wife if you're a man of pride. You can't love your husband if you're a woman of pride. Pride has devastating effect upon love.

So we do have to ask, has obedience to the truth included my being purified of pride? And also it must be said, dishonesty is a huge hindrance to loving the brethren. And we all have some notion of the terrible impact of dishonesty upon marriage. The statistic I reported, accurate or inaccurate, as I said I'm not sure.

But we know that a great deal of the problem of divorce and remarriage is a problem of trust that has grown out of dishonesty. Time after time, women say to me, I simply can't trust that man. Has there been any lack of honesty, truthfulness? Lust, clearly, makes it impossible to love the brethren.

Gossip has profound impact upon us. Any kind of a party spirit, greed, theft. Maggie and I have had a bookstore for 50 years.

And that's been the basis of our support so that I've been free to travel and preach around the land without any regard for money. But there are a lot of the brethren, so called, that owe us money. At the present time, we're owed nearly three quarters of a million dollars by professed Christians who've got books from us that they never paid for.

There's a huge level of dishonesty that has gripped so much of the church. Now, these various sins may not touch you personally, but we do have to ask this question. Has my soul been purified by obedience to the truth? Because it's impossible to love the brethren with unseemly love if you have not been purified through obedience to the truth.

Now, one of the reasons that I love Peter's writings in particular is because he was such a blunderbuss, an idiot, in his early years. And he made such a remarkable mess of everything. And that kind of makes me feel a bit like there's hope for me.

But you remember, after the resurrection, when Christ nailed Peter down on the shore, when they came in with their fishing boats, and Christ said to Peter, Peter, do you agape me? And you remember, don't you, that Peter said, I filios you. And you remember the second time the questions were the same. But the third time, Jesus dropped his question from the level where it began to the level where Peter lived.

Peter, is the best you can say that you filios me? And Peter said, you know all things. That's the best I can say. But in both the first epistle of Peter and the second, it's so obvious that Peter got that sorted out.

And that he moved from that love of the brethren, that Philadelphia kind of brotherly love, to agape love. And so clearly, that's what he's speaking about in this passage. And we must not overlook the emphasis that he himself is making here.

Look again at verse 22. For a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart. Now, when it says a sincere love of the brethren, it's talking about that brotherly affection.

But the second time the word is used, it's talking about agape love. Sincerely love, filios the brethren. Fervently love, agape, one another from the heart.

And so we do need to be honest and ask ourselves, to what extent do I have agape love for the brotherhood? If, when a vote is taken, both congregations vote to come together, what percentage of the people of grace will you have agape love for? And what percentage of the people at grace will have agape love for you? That's obviously a concern of great consequence that we face. But we know as an absolute, if we have not purified our souls through obedience to the truth, we're not going to end up with agape love, one for the other. So love sincerely, that is, without hypocrisy, without any ulterior motive.

Love consistently, not merely when things are going well, but through thick and thin we keep on loving. Love purely or chastely, no ulterior motives, no intended personal gain, just sheer agape love. Love mercifully, without any abuse or berating or second thoughts.

Love forgivingly, and oh, how much forgiveness is going to be necessary to have, if indeed two churches are to come together and to prosper in the ways of God. We must love unselfishly, with understanding, with sacrifice, with contentment and patience. All of that, as I've tried to make it clear, hanging on our purifying our souls through obedience to the truth.

Now that, I think, is enough. I could quit. I think I've spoken a message of consequence.

But that's nowhere near all that this passage speaks about. But let's look at verse 23. You have been born again, not of seed, which is perishable, but imperishable, that is through the living and abiding word of God.

Now that is a statement of such incredible consequence that we dare not just skip over it. I want to ask you this simple question. With what kind of seed was Christ born? Peter speaks of two kinds of seed, perishable and imperishable.

With what kind of seed, I repeat the question, was Christ born? Well, we all know that the angel appeared to the virgin Mary and told her she was with child. And that that child was conceived of the Holy Spirit. Imperishable seed.

Every person in the room tonight who has been born again was born again of that same imperishable seed. Now granted, in most of the churches, the bulk of the people who say they have been born again were born again, they think on the basis of a decision they made, a prayer that they prayed, some activity on their part. They're not the ones talked about in this passage.

Anyone who is responsible for their own regeneration is as dead as the devil. But everyone who has truly been born of God was born of imperishable seed. Now that's an obvious truth, but maybe you haven't thought in terms of the consequence of this.

Let us suppose, though it's probably stretching hope too far, that every person here tonight is born again by the Spirit of God. Let's hope that. Every one of us who has been born again had a previous birth.

Every one of us was born physically before we were born spiritually. Now, can it be said that as a result of our physical birth we were born of imperishable seed? Well, the obvious contrast intended in the passage, in our physical birth we were born of perishable seed. I mean, we live in a world of bluntness.

The sperm implanted in your mother's womb was perishable seed. Let it lay out in the sun for a few hours and it's dead. Now what this passage is saying is the tie between those who are born of imperishable seed is incredibly greater and more powerful than the tie that is a result of physical birth.

In other words, every believer should be closer to every other true believer than to their own brothers and sisters in the flesh. That means when you try to bring together two groups. If I look over some of your congregations and say, well, she doesn't look like a real Christian to me.

I'm a bit dubious about him. Or you look at me or some of the folk at Grace and you say, well, I don't know. I mean, do you realize some of those even paint their toenails? Our tendency is to look at the outward and to make determinations of the inward based on things that don't really mean anything at all.

But Peter is making it clear. Every true believer born of imperishable seed. So when he's talking about the brethren, that's who he's talking about.

All those born of the same imperishable seed. Now we're not going to make this thing go unless we purify our flesh through obedience to the truth. Our congregations are too different to bring them together.

Your pastor's preaching is too different from my preaching to make a go of things if we're going to try and accomplish it in the flesh. So it appears to me that this passage is for us at this time of incredible consequence. But now with those thoughts in mind, verse 24, all flesh is like grass.

Its glory is like the flower of the grass. The grass withers, the flower falls off. All those who are born of perishable seed are described in verse 23 as plants, as flowers that just simply dry up and die.

But no imperishable seed dries up and dies. So we're talking about bringing together imperishable seed. Now look, honestly, we might have some unregenerate people in our congregation.

But I bet you've got some here too. So we take that into consideration. Yes, we're not 100% truly Christian, but the question is have enough of us been purified in our souls sufficiently by obedience to the truth? To be able to come together and accomplish the will and the purpose of God.

Now my intent is not to answer that question tonight. I don't know. I just know that this is a major issue that we have to face.

We've got to be sure that, indeed, this is not an attempt to put together flowers that are going to wither and die. This is an attempt to bring together imperishable seed that will endure throughout all eternity. Now with those important thoughts in mind, look at what follows in verse 25.

The word of the Lord abides forever. This is the word that was preached to you. And he could add, this is the word that led to your being made alive.

For we are quickened by the word and the spirit. But now what happens in the next three verses is of incredible consequence. Therefore, putting aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisy, and envy, and all slander, like newborn baby.

Now you see, that's the key to whether this could possibly work or not. If every one of us is like a newborn baby, then it can be done. I mean, this is a young punk here.

He's tried. He really has tried, but there's not much to him. Or he says, look at that old duffer been leading that church.

No wonder it's been limping the way it has. No, we're going to have to become like newborn babes. And in order to be like newborn babes, we're going to have to pay attention now to the five words that he uses in verse one.

Let's not pass over them lightly. Let's focus precisely on what he says. Putting aside all malice.

That refers to a baseness or a meanness of spirit, a good-for-nothingness. It includes such things as ill will. Putting aside all malice.

Can we come into this arrangement having laid aside all malice? If we can't, it isn't going to work. If there's any malice in our hearts, then it's going to be undoing. You know what the attitude of Judas did, both to him and to the advancement of Christ.

You can't have a Judas in a situation like this. Too much is at stake. So, be sure all malice is dealt with.

Guile is the second word that he uses. Craftiness or deceitfulness, cunning, imposture, trickery, misleading others for gain. How many of us could stand right now and say with absolute honesty and God himself shouting amen to it? We are completely without guile.

I think one of the most powerful illustrations of guile found anywhere in scripture is the brief account of that relatively unknown man, Nathaniel. The Gospel of John, chapter 1. Remember when he was approaching Christ. Christ looked at him and said, Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile.

And Nathaniel was flabbergasted. And he intelligently asked, How do you know that about me? Well, we're not told how Christ knew that about him. In my mind, I kind of imagine that maybe at some earlier period, Christ had seen Nathaniel on his knees under a fig tree, thinking he was hiding behind a bush.

And nobody could see him. And he was seeking God. I don't know that that part of it's true.

What I know is true is that when Christ said, Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile, there was no guile shown on Nathaniel's part. He didn't respond by saying, Oh, that's a lovely thing for you to say. I could just wish it were true.

No, no, when you're without guile, you're not. There is no hypocrisy. And this word guile is a very practical word, a very simple word to lay hold of.

Do any of you go fishing? There's a boy and his dad who liked the idea of fishing, maybe some of the rest of you. Now when you go fishing, do you go to your printer first and say to your printer, I want you to print up a waterproof sign that says in fish language, Beware, what you see is not what you get. No, the whole concept of fishing with hook and line is built upon guile.

You want the fish to believe that you're offering it some luscious minnow or crawdad or this glorious earthworm, that he's got a free meal coming, that you have his interest at heart. Whereas in truth, you have his destruction at heart, not his interest. Guile is to be totally, or to be without guile is to be totally delivered from personal selfish motive.

To have absolutely nothing behind your action except Christian love. How many of us have dealt with guile? How many of us could honestly say, and as I suggested earlier, even have the Lord holler amen, that we are truly free of all guile. He then mentions hypocrisy, two-facedness, to be insincere, to be pretending to be something other than what we really are.

We have the account of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts chapter 5, powerful illustration of hypocrisy. Pretending, wanting others to believe that they had given sacrificially all the proceeds of the land that was sold when in truth. That was not the case at all.

If we are to be like newborn babes, desiring the sincere milk of the word and enjoying the blessing of God upon our talked about marriage, we're going to have to be free of hypocrisy. We're going to have to be free of envy, of all jealous feelings, of all ill will at the good fortune or even the advanced holiness of some. Now there will be some very distinct difference between the two congregations.

Inevitable. But if there's any envy, we're defeated. It just seems to me this is a passage that all of us have got to face head on and to ask with great care, am I free of malice? Am I free of guile? Am I free of hypocrisy? Am I free of envy? Or am I like the Pharisees and the Sadducees who hated Christ because they were so full of envy they thought he had come to take away their place and their nation? Now this man would be taking away my place and my nation.

You thought of that? I'm the pastor there now and as old as I am and as infirm as I am, you might feel, well he's, why didn't he just give up, retire? But God didn't call me to retire. I'm going to have to watch my heart. He's going to have to watch his heart.

Suppose that we do come together and once in a while I get to preach and people say nicer things about me than they said about him. Well, I mean, we're faced with a lot of wonderful reality here, but we've got to be absolutely sure that our hearts, our spirits, our souls have been purified by obedience to the truth. So we must see that there is no slander, no evil speaking, no hard language.

And then the result, verse 2 and 3, as newborn babes of sincere and earnest and incredibly urgent desire for the sincere milk of the word. This can only work if we all have this incredible desire and if every message given, every class taught, there is the sincere milk of the word given. I don't know anything harder on me than listening to people prance around about the Bible but never saying anything.

My spirit just boils within when I hear men supposedly preaching the word of God and all they've done is choose something out of the word of God and proclaim it. You know, when Timothy was addressed by Paul and he said, preach the word, you have to ask the question, am I preaching the word or preaching about the word? Or preaching from the word? Now we know that the word of God itself is a fire. We know that it's like a hammer breaking the rock in pieces.

We know that it's like the sword that is sharp and two-edged, piercing to the dividing asunder. What we desperately need is preaching the word of God but this won't work unless everybody who's doing the teaching and the preaching is really preaching the word of God. And unless all of us have come with a sincere love of the word and with an open hunger and thirst.

When Maggie and I had our first child, we lived in New York State and we lived in an old apartment house. And when we brought the baby home, we were very nervous because we had a very difficult landlord and he lived right below us. And we were constantly concerned lest he come protesting the cry of this infant.

The baby was born on a Sunday night, a Saturday night. And I was appointed to preach in one of the reformed churches in upstate New York on Sunday morning. And I was just full of this concern about this new infant in our home.

And I remember how my sermon was affected by this concern. But I've never lost this sensitivity, this awareness that every believer who has purified their soul through obedience to the truth and has this sincere and fervent love for the brethren has also this tremendous hunger for the word of God. And we were astonished when this little infant began opening his mouth.

And we thought so often, how can anything as tiny as that make such an incredible racket? And how can he possibly burst forth in wild cries only an hour after he's just been fed? Doesn't anything satisfy him? And the answer, no, no. Newborn bears desire the sincere milk of the word that they may grow thereby. And what could give us a happy marriage is if every person truly involved had this incredible thirst for the sincere milk of the word, the unadulterated milk of the word, the unwatered milk of the word, the word that caused each one to flourish and to grow.

May God help us to take this passage clearly to heart and to benefit from it as the Lord himself intended we should. The last words of verse 2, that you may grow in respect to salvation. And I want to close simply with a momentary focus on that.

We don't believe that salvation is something that is absolutely, totally accomplished in a moment of time. Regeneration occurs in a moment of time. Conversion occurs in a moment of time.

But salvation is an ongoing movement toward God. Personally, I long to be part of a church where the whole body is growing together unto salvation. And this passage is a great help in that.

Thank you and amen.

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