

Craving the Real Thing
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1 Peter 1:22-2:3

22 Now that you have purified your souls by your obedience to the truth so that you have genuine mutual love, love one another deeply from the heart. 23 You have been born anew, not of perishable but of imperishable seed, through the living and enduring word of God. 24 For

“All flesh is like grass
and all its glory like the flower of grass.

The grass withers,
and the flower falls,

25 but the word of the Lord endures forever.”

That word is the good news that was announced to you.

2 Rid yourselves, therefore, of all malice, and all guile, insincerity, envy, and all slander. 2 Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation—
3 if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.

Perhaps you’ve had the experience of doing a major overhaul on your eating. I still remember being introduced to a healthy cookie. Made with oat flour, almond flour, maple syrup, apple sauce, sunflower seeds and non-dairy chocolate chips, I was certain it would be a grim replacement for a “real” chocolate chip cookie... y’know, one with eggs, milk, milk chocolate chips, refined sugar, processed flour and of course lots of butter. I took a bite, and it was delicious! Not only was it sweet, but it was really satisfying too. I was offered a second cookie and before I realized what was happening I was saying, “No thank you, I’m full!”

Full!? From one cookie!? Never in my life had I been satisfied with just... one... cookie.

But I hope you are catching the irony in what I am describing. I’d spent my life eating cookies that came out a factory and calling them “real.” When I am offered a cookie with real ingredients, I meet it with suspicion. That cookie started me on a path of unlearning what I thought I knew about good nutrition and reconsidering what I consider to be satisfying food.

(I thank you in advance for not using this story as an opportunity to comment on my donut consumption during the coffee hour!)

Peter is making a similar food-based analogy. Here at the beginning of his letter, Peter has emphasized the importance of a new birth and he is urged his readers to be like newborn infants who crave pure spiritual milk. He seems to be trying to convey the sense that

a new birth should lead to new cravings.... as well as the end of old ones.

The more of God’s Word we get, Peter says, the less inclined we will be to fall back into old cravings and old patterns. He describes the things we are to get rid of. We may well look at

them and think, “Oh those are terrible! I don’t an appetite for malice!”

But let me ask you this: Do you crave UNBLEACHED ENRICHED FLOUR (WHEAT FLOUR, NIACIN, REDUCED IRON, THIAMINE MONONITRATE \, RIBOFLAVIN \, FOLIC ACID), SUGAR, PALM AND/OR CANOLA OIL, COCOA (PROCESSED WITH ALKALI), HIGH FRUCTOSE CORN SYRUP, LEAVENING (BAKING SODA AND/OR CALCIUM PHOSPHATE), SALT, SOY LECITHIN, CHOCOLATE, and ARTIFICIAL FLAVOR?

The answer is: Yes, yes you do! And if you are anything like me, you can eat six or seven oreos without batting an eye. And if you have ever done that, you know that a person can eat a whole sleeve of oreos and still feel hungry and unsatisfied. Why? Because it’s not real food!

Let’s look at Peter’s list of vices:

Malice... ill will in personal relationships

Guile (NIV “deceit”)... trickery to gain personal advantage

Insincerity (NIV hypocrisy)... pretense, the exact opposite of authentic love

Envy... resenting the good that another person enjoys

Slander... words that criticize or demeans another person

This reads a lot like the ingredient list on a package of oreos, except instead of being used to make junk *food* they make junk *relationships*. They may feel good and give us a feeling of satisfaction in the moment, but the enjoyment is short-lived and the long-term results are disastrous.

Peter says: You used to crave fake relationships, full of pretense and fronting. You used to crave relationships that were shallow, hallow and mean. The words you used – and the words you lived by – were once utter phony, two-faced and manipulative, all in an effort to get what you want. But even when you got it, it didn’t satisfy.

Peter contrasts false speaking and acting with the pure spiritual milk of God’s Word.

By pure, Peter means that it is sincere not interlaced with tricks designed to fool its readers. It come straight from God just as a mother’s milk come straight from their bodies. The word Peter uses for “spiritual” (*Logikas*) only appears in one other place in the NT: **Romans 12:1 – “present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your *spiritual* worship.”** The footnote connected to this word in both NIV and NRSV suggests the word can also be translated as *reasonable*.

God’s Word as real, simple, nourishing food for our spirits.

Taken together, Peter is describing God’s word as real, simple, nourishing food for our spirits. It’s what our spirits naturally crave. When it comes to God’s Word, it makes sense to us and it make makes sense for us.

Now I’m going to ask you a question that might mess with your head a little. The question is:

When Peter talks about God's Word, what is he talking about?

When we speak of God's Word, we invariably think of the Bible – that is, the inspired writings of the Jewish scripture that we call the Old Testament, and the gospels, letters and other writings in what we call the New Testament. In other words, for us Peter's letter is part of the Bible and is part of God's Spirit-inspired Word to us – a word that can be trusted to lead us to God the Father through the life, death, and resurrection of the Son. But I find myself wondering: Did Peter and Paul know they were writing part of the Bible? Did they realize they were composing part of God's inspired Word to future generations?

I have to assume they didn't. I have to assume they did not imagine for a moment that what they were writing would be held on par with "their" Bible – which was written by Moses, Isaiah and the other prophets, David and the other Psalmists.

So when Peter speaks of God's Word, is he thinking strictly about the Old Testament?

I don't think that's quite right either. I suspect that Peter, like theologians through the centuries, understood that Scripture is one form of God's Word, but not the only form.

To start with, we know that Jesus Christ is the Word of God. John begins his gospel with this truth:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being 4 in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

We have a name for the power that God expressed when God spoke the material universe into being, and that name is Christ. Everything is infused with the Word of God.

Then, we have Scriptures as the inspired Word of God. We trust the words of the Old and New Testaments to be the words of flawed people inspired and enlivened by the Holy Spirit to be God's Word for us. Peter may or may not have thought about his letter in this way. But I'll bet he understood that his words – drawing heavily from the Scriptures he knew so intimately – was a continuation of God's Word to God's people.

And then there's a third way we can understand God's Word. I still remember sitting in my Reformed Worship class in a state of shock when I learned that WE Reformed Christians believe that preaching is ALSO the Word of God! It's a sobering reminder of the privilege and responsibility occupiers of pulpits are given.

So...

What are we talking about when we speak of the Word of God?

- Jesus Christ the Living Word
- Scripture: the Inspired Word
- Preaching the Proclaimed Word

The big idea I want to leave you with this morning is this:

Core

We need the Word of God in all its forms in order to grow in our salvation.

Just like eating nutritiously enables us to sleep better, be more active, and fend off illness, taking in God's Word enables us to "do more" as well. The "more" Peter is thinking about is love. The love described here is *philadelphia*, concerns for one's sister and brother. This love is to be done with vigor. The word "deeply" is literally "to be stretched out," used in Luke/Acts to describe especially intense prayers (see Edwards).

We are called to not consume God's Word, but we are called to offer God's Word too. We are called to bless others in the name of Jesus. We are called to share scripture with one another as an act of love. We are called to proclaim Christ, to give our testimonies, and to receive the same from others.

Call

Share a verse of Scripture and a word of encouragement to a Christian sister or brother this week.

If I were a really good pastor, this is the part where I would tell you that I have made some REAL cookies for you in order to help you really understand the difference between real food and fake food and why craving the real thing is what it's all about.

Wouldn't it be great if you had a really good pastor instead just a pretty good one? Yeah, that would be pretty awesome.

Let's pray!