

Intro:

Q: How can we live as Christians in a Non-Christian world?

That's a perplexing question. It's not easy, is it? But God has graciously given us a letter in the Bible written especially to counsel Christians living in a counter-Christian culture. I Peter.

Life was not easy for the Christians living in Pontus, Galatia, etc. Many had been forced to abandon jobs and houses because of the pressure they endured as followers of Christ. How did Peter encourage his struggling friends?

First, he reminded them to bless God for their salvation (vv 3-12). As Christians, we have every reason to bless God. When we were born again, God gave us a living hope (3). God has guaranteed us an inheritance reserved in heaven (4). Right now, God is using the trials of life to shape our character and refine our faith (7). So Peter encouraged his brothers in Christ by elaborating on God's marvelous salvation.

Last week, as we moved to vv 17-21, Peter answered the question of HOW. How were we saved? How did God redeem us? How did He set us free from being hostages to sin and death? We learned how we were NOT set free (18). Then how we WERE set free (19-21). Our redemption involved a great payment. We were redeemed by the precious blood of Christ.

Q: What is true of people who are genuinely redeemed?

Illust: This past Monday evening, while walking through Scioto Memorial Hospital, I noticed a banner on the second floor that read, "National Critical Care Week." I called the hospital and asked about it, and was told, "The purpose is to recognize those involved in critical care work."

The Church has been designed by God to be a Critical (or Intensive) Care Unit.

Illust:

Q: For what things should redeemed people have an intensive care?

Proposition: As Christians, we ought to have an intensive care for 2 things, according to I Peter 1:22-2:3.

- I. We must have an Intensive Care for People (22).
- II. We must have an Intensive Care for the Word of God (1:23-2:3).
 - A. We need the Word for Salvation (23-25).
 - B. We need the Word for Growth (2:1-3).
 1. To grow, we must repent of sin (1).
 2. To grow, we must relish the Word (2-3).

Note: There's an unfortunate chapter break between 1:25 and 2:1. Remember, I Peter is a letter. When Peter wrote it, there were no chapter and verse numbers. Those were added much later by the translators.

As God's people, we are to have an intensive care for 2 things. First...

I. We must have an Intensive Care for People (22).

Notice carefully the context. Peter gave us the first mark of a redeemed person last week, in v 21.

Mark #1--Genuine Faith (21)

V 21 "Who by Him do believe in God..."

Faith is a hallmark of Christianity. We are saved by faith (Eph 2:8). We are called to live by faith (Gal 3:11). Faith has to do with our vertical relationship, our relationship with God.

But there's another trait which will characterize the genuinely redeemed.

Mark #2--Fervent Love (22)

V 22 "...see that you love one another with a pure heart fervently."

Faith has to do with our relationship with God. Love deals with our relationships with one another. Faith is vertical. Love is horizontal.

Listen. As Christians, we ought to have an intensive care for people. Love isn't optional equipment for us. It's part of the base package deal of the Christian.

Peter will have much more to say to us about "love" in his letter.

2:17 "Love the brotherhood."

3:8 "Finally, be ye all of one mind...love as brethren."

4:8-9 "And above all things have fervent love..."

There's no question about it. We are to have an intensive care for people.

But why? Peter answers by giving us 2 participles. "Love" is the main verb in v 22. Linked to this independent clause are two dependent clauses, which explain why we are to love.

1. Seeing that you have purified your souls... (22)
2. Being born again (23).

Notice this matter of fact statement about Christians.

V 22 "Seeing that you have purified your souls..."

You HAVE purified your souls. Past tense. What does that mean? The verb means "to cleanse from defilement."

Illust: Spring cleaning of houses

If you're a Christian, you've experienced a "housecleaning" of your soul. How did it happen? First, "in (or "by") obeying the truth." Jesus said, "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free." The Spirit of God used the Truth of God to transform you. The truth set you free. The truth cleansed you. But there's more.

Q: Did you see the result of this spiritual housecleaning?

A: V 22 "unto unfeigned love of the brethren." Watch the connection. Peter says a way to tell if a person has been cleansed on the inside is to look at his relationships on the outside.

Illust: John Wooden, the legendary basketball coach at UCLA, once shared his coaching strategy as follows (taken from H.Hendricks tape on "motivation"). One, get the team in condition. Two, teach them the fundamentals, the basics. Three, get your men to work together as a team, not as individuals.

God designed the church to function as a team. His aim is for us to work together. We are to be an intensive care unit. Each of us are responsible to demonstrate an intensive love for people.

Q: What do we mean by "intensive love"?

Notice that Peter says our love is to be marked by three qualities:

1. Our Love is to be Relational--"love one another"

You can't love in a vacuum. Peter uses 2 different words for "love" in v 22. The phrase "love of the brethren" is actually one word (philadelphia), with the greek root, "philos." Philos is brotherly love. We are to have a fraternal love for each other. The second word is "agape. Agape love is divine love. We are to love people as God loves us.

2. Our Love is to be Genuine--"with a pure heart."

Our love is to be "unfeigned" and "pure," that is, sincere. As Christians we're not to use people to get what we want.

3. Our Love is to be Fervent--"fervently."

The word is an athletic term that means, "striving with all of one's energy." Love is something we have to work at. We are to be deeply devoted to one another in the church. Surface, facade relationships won't cut it. God commands us to have an intensive care for one another.

You say, "Wow, that's a pretty high standard! I don't think I have it in me to love that way!"

Listen carefully. The type of love that God requires is not something we can manufacture. No. It must be produced in us. By nature, all of us are selfish. It takes a miracle of God to enable us to love.

That's exactly what God did. He gave us the capacity to love. When?

V 23 "Being born again"

There's the second participle. Who is it that can love one another with a pure heart? Those who have been born again. In fact, love is an evidence that a person has been born of God.

I Jn 4:7-8 "Beloved, let us love one another..."

Q: Do you have an intensive care for people? Are you a loving person?

Love is not a matter of feeling. It's a matter of willing. We show love when we choose to treat others the way God has treated us.

Illust:

Tran: What's true of a person who is genuinely redeemed? First, if we are redeemed, we must have an intensive care for people.

II. We must have an Intensive Care for the Word of God (1:23-2:3).

God's Word is indispensable for us. We must have an insatiable commitment to the Speech of God. Do you know why?

We are indebted to the Word of God, for 2 reasons...

A. We need the Word for Salvation (23-25).

Vv 23-25 "Being born again...by the word of God..."

Peter uses the word "logos." It refers to God's self-revelation. That includes the spoken and written disclosure of God. What's that?

Peter identifies what he had in mind...

V 25 "And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you."

How were Peter's readers saved? Peter reminds them, "You were saved when someone came to you, and announced to you the good news of the Person and redemptive work of Jesus Christ. That message was the Word of God. That Word was the instrument that the Spirit of God used to give you new birth.

V 12 "...by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Spirit."

Q: What is it that makes God's Word so unique?

A: Notice 2 characteristics of God's Word:

1. The Word "liveth." (NIV "living")
2. The Word "abideth." (NIV "enduring" = to stay, remain)

Let's focus on the second characteristic first. When Peter says God's Word is abiding, he means we can count on it. It won't change or lose its power. Peter illustrated this truth by quoting Isaiah 40.

Remember what happened in Isaiah 40? God announced in Isa 1-39 that He'd had it with His disobedient people in Judah. He was going to judge them. He would send them into exile in Babylon. They would be oppressed, but they wouldn't be forgotten. In ch 40, God promised His people that He would bring them back to the Promised Land.

Q: How could those exiles be sure God's promise would actually happen?

A: Is 40:6-8, "For all flesh is like grass..."

The Word of God is "abiding". It abides forever (25).

The Word of God is also "living." What does that mean? When Peter says that God's Word is living, he means it imparts life.

Ps 33:4 "For the Word of the Lord is right."

Ps 33:9 "For He spoke and it was done..."

Is 55:10-11 "For as the rain comes down...So shall my word be that goes forth out of my mouth; it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it."

Application: Let that truth sink in. The Word of God is living. It imparts life. Creative church programs don't save people. Clever techniques don't save people. Emotional church services don't save people. The Word of God brings new birth to people. The Word of God is indispensable for salvation.

Quote: William Still, a Scottish evangelical minister, has written a little booklet titled, "The Work of the Pastor." In it he makes a pretty blunt but helpful observation, "The pastor is called upon to feed the sheep. (Now that may seem quite obvious.) He is called upon to feed the sheep even if the sheep do not want to be fed. He is certainly not to become an entertainer of goats. Let goats entertain goats, and let them do it in Goatland. You will certainly not turn goats into sheep by pandering to their goatishness." (from Reformation/Revival Journal, Fall 1992, 68)

As redeemed people, we must have an intensive care for the Word of God. We need the Word for salvation. Do you remember the day the Spirit of God used the Word of God to open up your eyes to your need for the Son of God?

Illust: Story of Luke Short, converted at the age of 103!

Tran: We ought to have an intensive care for the Word of God, first, because we need it for salvation.

B. We need the Word for Growth (2:1-3).

Here's the unfortunate chapter break. Notice the first word, "Wherefore." Notice the emphasis on the "word" in v 2.

Back in March 1990 we studied 2:1-3 in a series on "The Sufficiency of the Scriptures." We won't exegete in detail these verses this morning. But let's skim the cream off the top. Vv 1-3 tell us we need the Word for Spiritual Growth.

If we are to grow, we need to take 3 steps.

1. To grow, we must repent of sin (1).

Moms, did you ever call your children for dinner, only to hear the reply, "I don't want to come. I'm not hungry." After marching into their room, you discovered the reason. An empty bag of cookies.

Sometimes children lose their appetite because they've been eating the wrong things (Wiersbe). So it is for Christians. If we are to have a healthy desire for the Word of God, some things have to go.

V 1 "Wherefore, laying aside all malice..."

Peter identifies 5 sins. They're all interpersonal sins. They've all got to go! Malice (general wickedness; primarily a negative attitude towards people). Guile (deceit). Hypocrisies (pretending). Envy (discontent). All evil speakings.

Q: How much sin has to go? All...All...All

If we want to grow, we must repent of sin.
Quote: "Sin will keep you from this book, and this book will keep you from sin."

2. *To grow, we must relish the Word (2-3).*

Vv 2-3 "As newborn babes..."

This is a great section. There's some real practical instruction here. If we want to grow we need to take a lesson from a newborn baby.

Illust: Babies don't know much. In fact babies don't desire much. But there's one thing a baby knows. A baby knows what it wants. And it's not blue booties, or pizza. A baby craves milk! In fact, that little infant will become violent if that need is not met!

Listen. Peter's not primarily talking to new Christians here. He's making a comparison. Just as a baby knows its need, and just as a baby craves milk, so all Christians need to desire the Word of God. Why?

v 2 "that you may grow thereby"

To grow we must repent of sin. And to grow we must relish the Scriptures. And an amazing thing about God's Word is this. The more you get the more you want!
V 3 "If so be you have tasted..."

Illust: We raised day old calves. Used to fight each other for milk!

Conclusion:

Today we've seen that as Christians, we ought to have an intensive care for 2 things--for People, and for the Word of God.

Q: How are you doing?

--Do you love people? Is it a priority in your life to love people? Can you name some people that you have invested yourself into in the past week?

Illust:

--Do you crave the Word of God? It's vital for our salvation. And for our spiritual growth. Do you spend time in the Word daily?

You say, "I'm not satisfied with my life. I want to change." Listen. It's the Word of God that produces change in our lives. It's God's Word that takes us from where we are to where we should be.

May God help us all to have an intensive care for people and for His Word.