

The Imperishable Word of God

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[0:00] Isaiah chapter 40. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

A voice says, cry out. And I said, what shall I cry? All men are like grass and all their glory is like the flowers of the field. The grass withers and the flowers fall because the breath of the Lord blows on them.

Surely the people are grass. The grass withers and the flowers fall. But the word of our God stands forever. Amen. You who bring good tidings to Zion, go up on a high mountain.

You who bring good tidings to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout. Lift it up. Do not be afraid. Say to the towns of Judah, here is your God. See, the sovereign Lord comes with power and his arm rules for him.

See, his reward is with him and his recompense accompanies him. He tends his flock like a shepherd. He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart.

[1:27] He gently leads those who that have young. Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand or with the breath of his hand marked off the breath of his hand marked off the heavens?

Who has held the dust of the earth in a basket or weighed the mountains on the scales and the hills in a balance? Who has understood the mind of the Lord or instructed him as his counselor?

Whom did the Lord consult to enlighten him and who taught him the right way? Who was it that taught him knowledge or showed him the path of understanding? Surely the nations are like a drop in a bucket.

They're regarded as dust on the scales. He weighs the islands as though they were fine dust.

Lebanon is not sufficient for altar fires, nor its animals enough for burnt offerings.

Before him, all the nations are as nothing. They're regarded by him as worthless and less than nothing. To whom, then, will you compare God?

[2:32] What image will you compare him to? As for an idol, a craftsman casts it and a goldsmith overlays it with gold and fashions silver chains for it.

A man too poor to present such an offering selects wood that will not rot. He looks for a skilled craftsman to set up an idol that will not topple. Do you not know? Have you not heard?

Has it not been told from the beginning? Have you not understood since the earth was founded? He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth and its people are like grasshoppers.

He stretches out the heavens like a canopy and spreads them out like a tent to live in. He brings princes to naught and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing. No sooner are they planted.

No sooner are they sown. No sooner do they take root in the ground. Then he blows on them and they wither and a whirlwind sweeps them away like chaff.

[3:30] To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal? Says the Holy One. Lift your eyes and look to the heavens. Who created all of these?

He who brings out the starry host one by one and calls them each by name. Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing. Why do you say, O Jacob, and complain, O Israel?

My way is hidden from the Lord. My cause is disregarded by my God. Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the creator of the ends of the earth.

He will not grow tired or weary and his understanding no one can fathom. He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak.

Even youths grow tired and weary and young men stumble and fall. But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles.

[4:36] They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not be faint. The longer that we live upon this earth, the more we're forced to face the reality that the things of this earth are temporary.

They are passing away. And spring is already here, a little early this year. Things are growing. They're greening up now.

The earth is becoming covered again with green and growing plants. But summer and spring are always followed by fall. And those annual, I have a background in agriculture.

Those annual plants, they grow, they mature, they die. And if anything is still living, by the time Jack Frost comes along, he finishes the job. The leaves on the trees die and fall off.

And after enough years pass, the trees themselves die and pass away. Indeed, plants do not last. They are perishable.

[5:42] But that's not just plants that are perishable here upon the earth. The same is true of people, especially of our bodies. And it is true, isn't it, that our souls will never die.

That is definitely true. It's also true that if Christ tarries, that our bodies that die one day will come to life again. Those who are God's children do eternal life and happiness.

Those who are not to eternal torment. But there's also a real sense in which our bodies in their present condition are perishable.

And we painfully see that in our own families if we stop and ponder that. I was caused to think.

Some of us start off with a blessing in our early days. Some of us actually have great-grandparents that are living when we were born.

And I had that blessing. There was one great-grandma that was still around when I was born and actually interchanged with poems with her. She was a godly lady. And she lived until I was 12 years of age.

[6:43] But then she died. And she was buried. And most of us have at least some grandparents that are living for a time when we enter this life. And we have many happy memories, some of us at least, with those grandparents.

And yet, one by one, if God gives us life and we continue on, we end up laying them to rest. And then, as time passes, if the Lord continues to give us life, our parents.

Dearly beloved parents. Mom, Dad. One by one, God takes them. And my wife and I are at that stage in our lives now, where that's almost done, where all three of our four parents are now gone.

And only my dear 91-year-old father is left of our parents among us. And every time I go to see him, which I hope to do again in another week, I see this formerly strong Iowa farmer, weaker and weaker, as his body is, in a real sense, dying and is perishing.

And the reality is that if time goes on long enough and God continues to give us life, we're going to find that we ourselves are wearing out as well. We find that, in a real sense, we're in the process of dying while we live.

[7:59] I'm almost 60 now. Two more. Actually, less than two months. I'll be 60 years of age and beginning to feel that in my own self, we increasingly are forced to face the reality that unless the Lord Jesus comes first, the day is coming when we will lie down in death and our bodies as well will perish.

Now, some of you may be saying, you know, it's a bright, sunny spring day, Pastor. That's kind of a downer subject. Okay. So it's a little depressing. Why do you start off talking about such things this morning?

Well, it's because God's word talks about those things. It talks about plants. It talks about our bodies. It talks about these realities. But bless God, it also says some other things.

It talks about some things that are imperishable. It talks about things that will never die, that will never decay, that will never be destroyed.

It talks about things that will be forever existing, will be living forever, active and effective for the eternal good of the children of God.

[9:04] Well, a while back when I was reading in my devotions, the first chapter of first Peter, I was struck by the fact that I believe I could give a case that this chapter really describes four different but closely related imperishables.

Four different things that are imperishable. There is the imperishable inheritance of the Christian.

There is the imperishable proven genuineness of our faith, which is a whole subject of its own.

There is, in a real sense, the imperishable blood of Christ, although we've got to understand that accurately. But there is a fourth and a final imperishable mentioned in 1 Peter chapter 1.

It's the one that we saw also in Isaiah chapter 40. It is the imperishable word of God. And so I'd ask you to turn with me this morning to 1 Peter. That's what we're going to focus upon.

1 Peter chapter 1. We'll read verse 22. And really the thought here carries on across the chapter division. Sometimes those divisions aren't so fortunate. And we're going to read from chapter 1, verse 22, through chapter 2, verse 3.

[10:10] Please follow as I read 1 Peter chapter 1, beginning with verse 22. 2 Peter chapter 2, verse 22.

And now here's the quote from Isaiah that we saw. All flesh is like grass, and all its glory like the flower of the 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. And actually that word is a word upon which the word gospel is related. And in a real sense we could say the word that was gospelled to you. Therefore, putting aside all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord.

Well, let's look to the Lord in prayer once more before we consider further this passage. Father, we thank you for your goodness to us. We thank you that you have given us your word.

[11:48] We thank you that it is imperishable. We pray you'd help us to understand accurately what that means, how that applies to us, Lord. We pray you'd give us hearts to respond aright.

We look to you because we know that your word standing alone will do us no good. Unless your spirit comes and works through the word in our hearts that we will not profit.

And so we pray your help. I pray your help as the speaker that I would clearly and accurately reflect your mind and your word. We pray that you'd help us all to have hearts that are hungering after your word like a little baby.

We pray this in Christ's name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Well, this morning we're going to consider three basic questions about the word of God that I believe this passage answers at least in part.

The first question is this. How is the word of God described here? How is the word of God described? Notice, first of all, in verse 123, it is described as being living.

[12:53] If you'll notice that in verse 21 again, that it is actually 23. Excuse me. We've got a typo here that you've been born again, not have seeded as perishable, but imperishable.

That is through the living and enduring word of God. And this idea of living is very closely related to the idea of being imperishable. The word of God isn't dead.

It's alive. And what does that mean? Well, some of you might think when you think about the word of God being alive, there might be a verse that you might think of right away. Any of you thought about it? It's another verse like it.

It's Hebrews 4. Why don't we just keep our finger here and turn over a minute. And it kind of explains further what it means for the word of God to be alive as opposed to dead. Hebrews chapter 4 and verse 12.

For the word of God is living. There's the idea. 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.

[14:09] And another passage that says describes the word similarly is Acts 7:38. Maybe we won't turn there. We're just going to focus here on Hebrews 4:12. This passage tells us that God's word is alive.

And it tells us what that means. It's active. It's effective in working in our hearts and in our lives. You know, we're good, aren't we, at putting a good front up, right?

And you could be here. You can walk in the church this morning and you can look nice, you know, and smile and everything's hunky-dory. But that may not be what's going on in the inside, right?

And the inside may be all torn up.

May be torn up with grief, with fear, with guilt. Who knows what's going on in there? Well, the word of God has this amazing ability. It's alive as the spirit of God takes it.

And it can pierce into our hearts and it can get down to what's really going on in there and our thoughts and our motives, what makes us tick. That's the word of God. It's alive.

[15:04] Bless God. It does good things, which is what encourages me to stand up here and try to preach this morning. Because if I bring the word of God, I'm not on a fool's errand. I'm bringing a living instrument of God that by his grace and his spirit will be effective.

And so the contents of our Bibles are living. They are powerful in the language of Romans 1.17. Why are they living? Why are they powerful? Well, it's because of the words of the living and powerful God.

And therefore, they reflect the God whose words they are. But now, going back to 1 Peter, our text gives us a further description of God's word that also is very close in meaning to the idea of being imperishable.

God's word is abiding. Or it is remaining forever. And notice this again, going back in verse 23 through 25.

It says at the end of 23, through the living and enduring or abiding word of God. For all flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass.

[16:11] The grass withers and the flower falls off. But, and here's the word again, the word of the Lord endures or abides forever. What does that mean?

It says the word will always be around. It's always going to remain. It will never go away. It will never again. What we just saw, it will never die or stop being alive.

And therefore, it will never stop being effective, being powerful, being completely trustworthy. And once again, there's another verse in the New Testament that underscores this reality.

And notice it in its context in Matthew 24, 32 to 35. The words of our Lord. Matthew 24. Near the end of his earthly life, he was speaking about things to come.

And as he speaks about those things to come, notice beginning in verse 32, what he says. Now learn the parable from the fig tree.

[17:11] When its branch has already become tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. So you too, when you see all these things, these signs I've been talking about of my return.

When you see all these things, recognize that he or it is near, right at the door. Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.

Heaven and earth will pass away. But my words will not pass away. There's that idea again of abiding or remaining.

The Lord Jesus is talking about incredible events. He's going to come in the air. He's going to come with a trumpet blast. He's going to gather all of the elect from the four corners of the earth. He's saying these things are going to happen.

And the generation that sees these signs that are leading up to that event, they're going to not die before that event happens. And you might just could imagine, maybe some of the disciples are saying, you know, that sounds pretty far-fetched.

[18:12] I mean, that's pretty. You're saying that he's going to come with a trumpet blast. All this is going to happen. And judgment's going to happen. How do I know that's true? And our Lord anticipates that.

And he says, you see this earth around you? You see the heavens that are there and the sun that came up this morning? It's all going to go away. It's all going to be destroyed. And a new heavens and new earth raised up in its place.

And when that heaven and earth has passed away, been rolled up the heavens like a scroll, the earth burned up with its elements by heat. When that day takes place, my word's still going to be there.

My word won't go away. The whole universe may go away and it will. But my word is not going away. And so we see this truth of the word of God being abiding or remaining.

Well, now we come to a third description of God's word in our text, one that I've been focusing more upon. It's described as being imperishable seed. Imperishable seed.

[19:14] And go back to 1 Peter 1, 23. You see it where it's described. It says that you've been born again, not of seed that is perishable, but imperishable.

Now, I want you to notice four things about this imperishable seed. First of all, what is the significance of the picture of seed? Well, the verses that follow verse 23 point us in two directions. They point to the area of the plant world and they point us also to the area of human beings. Talks about all flesh. And so in the plant world, I'm a farmer back by background. The farmer does what? He sows his seed. Why does he sow it? Because there's the potential from that seed to reap a good harvest at the end of the growing season. And also among human beings.

By the bringing together of the seed of the mother and the seed of the father, a child is brought into the world. Well, in a similar way. Through the imperishable seed of the word of God.

[20 : 11] We who know the Lord are born as well. We're told here we're born into a spiritual family. That by the imperishable seed of the word of God, we become members of God's spiritual family.

Becoming his spiritual children. And the Lord Jesus used this picture with the relate. Actually, the related verb of the word seed here in his parable of the sower. He talks about the sower going out to sow seed.

Remember that parable. Some falls on the hard ground. Some falls on the rocky ground. Some falls on the weedy ground. Some falls on the good soil and brings forth the harvest. And remember, what is the seed?

It's the word of God. It's that same picture Peter, who probably heard that parable, is carrying forward now. The word of God. It's a seed that brings forth a harvest.

Well, that's the first thing that we see. What's the significance of the seed? Second thing. What is the contrast here with the imperishable seed of God's word? Because it talks about seed, not perishable.

[21 : 14] So it's talking about a perishable seed. And then it's talking about imperishable seed. What is the perishable seed? And in this context, it is seed that in a real sense stops existing in its original form in the process of producing something better.

That's what it is. It's something that stops existing in its original form in the process of producing something better. And both Jesus and Paul in John 12 and 1 Corinthians 15 talked about the reality that a grain seed falls into the ground.

And then there's a real sense in which that seed dies in the process of producing a grain plant that has much more seed upon it. And so in that sense, the grain seed is perishable.

It ceases to exist in its original form. Now, I have a background in agriculture and biology. And we could talk about that all day. But here's the picture. The picture is the little germ of embryo that's in that seed grows.

And as it grows, what happens? The main part of the seed is the food. The starchy stuff, it eats it up. The starch disappears. The food disappears. The seed coat wrinkles up.

[22 : 24] It ceases to exist in its original form. That's the picture. In that way, it dies as it produces the plant. Well, that's the contrast. Next thing.

Third thing. What is not meant by the fact that the word of God is imperishable? What's not meant by the fact that the word of God is imperishable? Well, it doesn't mean that individual copies of God's word, individual Bibles like this.

I got here in my hand. Or parts of the Bible. Well, it does not mean that those individual copies will never perish or be destroyed. It's not talking about that. The reality is, although we might wish it were otherwise, every original manuscript that was first written by men by divine inspiration of God doesn't exist today.

They aren't there. They've been copied and recopied. The original manuscripts decayed and fell apart. And I've been reminded recently of how that happens in this cursed world. It was passed on to me an old family Bible.

And this old family Bible, the cover, has fallen off of it. Pages have come off the front and the back. They're disintegrating. The paper's breaking down. And my father gave me the task of going to a binder and try to bind what's left back together again.

[23 : 40] And we've preserved it for a little while longer. But it's falling apart. The pages are breaking up. And that's what happens to copies. We're not talking about that. We're not talking about the copies of the scriptures being preserved.

Well, then the fourth thing about this seed. What does it mean that God's word is imperishable? What does it mean? And there are two closely related things that it does mean. First thing is that it means that the divinely inspired contents of God's word.

We're talking about the individual words. We're talking about the way the words are arranged in sentences and phrases. The contents of the word of God have been preserved by God and will never be destroyed.

Those contents will continue to exist forever through the copies that have been made. Now, somebody may raise a question again if you are more informed and say, well, haven't there been some minor little variations that have come into the copying process over the years?

And so you've got different manuscripts with some little changes. Yes, there have been because copyists are not divinely inspired. OK. And so there have been some minor things. But we can have the confidence that within the manuscripts that we possess today is indeed that word of God, which was originally given.

[24 : 59] And the changes, the minor variations that have happened are minor and do not affect the basic truths of the word of God. The contents of God's word that were given by divine inspiration.

We have it today. It has been preserved. And there's a closely related thing. If the contents, the words and the arrangement of the words has been preserved, then the definite objective truths that are communicated in those contents also never change or stop being true.

So what are we talking about that never changes or stops being true? What God says about himself and what he's like, his description of himself never stops being true. His description of us and what we're like and our situation, our relationship to God, that never stops being true.

The details that we are given of his commands, which we all have broken, that doesn't stop being true. The warnings that he gives us if we do not repent and believe in Christ, they don't stop being true.

And the promises of God, blessed be God, there are promises, including the promises of the gospel, that if you believe in Christ, who's been punished in the place of sinners, you will be forgiven. You will have eternal life.

[26 : 08] The promises and all the promises and all the other promises of Christ's presence with his people, of his comforting of his people, as we read in Isaiah 40. All of those promises never will pass away.

Those truths taught in the contents never stop existing. Well, that's the description of the word of God in the passage before us. It is living. It abides forever.

It is imperishable. But this passage has a second question that it answers as well. Here's the second question. What impact has the imperishable word of God already had upon the believer? What is the impact that this word of God has already had, if you're a Christian this morning, upon your soul? And this passage gives us a general answer, and then it gives us two specific answers. And the general answer is in chapter 2, verse 3, where it's kind of thrown on as an end note. It says, all this is true if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord.

[27 : 11] What is an impact upon the child of God? If you know Christ today, you have personally tasted of the kindness of the Lord. You have come to know his mercy, his grace to you in many, many ways.

And we could start listing them, couldn't we, of all those blessings. But that's not what the main focus is this morning. We have tasted of the kindness of the Lord. And there are then a couple specific things that Peter mentions here.

And the first one is this. He says that this impact of the word of God. First of all, the word of God is the spiritual seed through which we have been born again into God's family, as we mentioned before.

It's a spiritual seed by which we're born again into God's family in verse 23. He's talking about the new birth, that new birth that Jesus talked about back in John chapter 3.

And it's fun to just imagine Peter remembering these things that he heard from the master's lips when he was upon this earth. But he's talking about that new birth, a new birth that the spirit of God ultimately must work in a man's heart.

[28 : 13] That new birth that no man can see from the outside. It's an internal job that is going on as God changes the heart and turns us away from a heart that's wedded to our sin and loving sin and the things of the world and the things of the flesh and the pride of life.

And instead turning our hearts to Christ to look to him for mercy and to love him and to follow him. Regeneration, the new birth. That's what he's talking about here. And this new birth, we're told, comes about through communicating of the gospel to us.

As we saw before in verse 25 of chapter 1, that idea that this word has been proclaimed to you, this word that has been gospelsed to you through the preaching of the word of God, through the communicating of the word of God, has come about the new birth.

Now, the most usual way is when it's communicated to us by someone else, through the preaching, through teaching. And I would imagine if I asked a show of hands of you who are believers, that the

majority of you would say it's come about through hearing it through someone else. Sometimes it comes through just simply reading it because we're so blessed to have the copies of the word of God in our own hands, in our own language. But it's through the word of God. That's the means that God uses for regeneration.

[29 : 26] And I just would make an observation here before we go on, an application. Although the new birth is a supernatural work of the Holy Spirit, the new birth is not something that happens apart from God's written and preached word.

If you don't have the preached and written word of God, you won't have the new birth and you will not have salvation. And it is only as the gospel and God's word is communicated to us and preached to us.

It's only in that way that we are cleansed and we are forgiven. And what does that tell us? It says that every effort, every effort to evangelize in a community like Bremen here, every effort to take the gospel to other places, the only way you can do it effectively is you've got to get this book, the word of God and the gospel of Jesus Christ and his shed blood in particular.

You've got to get it to lost sinners. If you don't do that, you are not doing the mission that Christ gave us to do. There are many benevolent things that we ought to do in the name of Christ. Bless God for those efforts. But those efforts always have attached to them and as a main focus, getting the regenerating new birth word of God to the people who stand in need of it.

[30 : 43] And that should always be our focus. We lose sight of that. We've lost sight of the whole purpose of our work of missions and evangelism. Well, in summary, one major impact of the imperishable word of God in the life of the believer is that it's through the word that we've experienced the new birth.

And that we enter God's spiritual family and that we become brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ. But this passage indicates a second impact that God's word has already begun to have upon the child of God.

It's related to the fact that we've had a new birth and our brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ. The word of God is the gracious standard of truth, which we have begun to obey. It is the gracious standard of truth, which we have begun to obey.

And notice 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.

The truths revealed in the Bible have had a central role. It says here of purifying our hearts, purifying our hearts. For what reason? To have a sincere, a genuine love for our brothers and sisters in Christ as we have obeyed that truth.

[31 : 59] It has especially been the gospel. I believe Peter has mainly in view here as we've obeyed the gospel. How do you obey the gospel? Does that mean you earn your way to heaven? No. How do you obey the gospel?

You do what Christ says you need to do. You need to repent of your sin and believe in Jesus Christ. And as we obey the gospel, we repent, we turn from our old pattern of life. We believe in a Savior crucified for sinners.

It's in obeying that way that we purify our souls with a resulting fruit of love, genuine love for one another as brothers and sisters in Christ.

You say, well, is my love for Christ's children, my brothers and sisters, is that perfected yet? No, it sure isn't. I wish it was. It's not. Is there room for abounding more and more in love for our brethren? Yes, there is. But if someone is a child of God, and John's very clear about this, isn't he, when he gets to 1 John? If someone's a child of God, to some degree, there already has been existing in their heart, because they're purified by obeying the gospel, there's already in their heart a love for their brothers and sisters.

[33 : 06] And it's a real love. It's not a love of the lips. It's a love that's truly flowing from their heart. And so there's that reality that this is an impact of the word of God.

If it has come to our hearts in a saving way, it has purified our hearts as we've obeyed the gospel and producing genuine love in our hearts. Now, there are other impacts of the word of God in the life of Christians that are part of the kindness of the Lord to us.

But those two are emphasized in these verses. And now we're going to go on and we're going to look at a third major question from what we're studying here in 1 Peter. How should we who are Christians respond to the imperishable word of God?

How should we as Christians respond to the imperishable word of God? And two basic responses are outlined for us in this passage. First one, we should keep obeying the truth in God's word. We should keep obeying the truth in God's word. And especially emphasized here is we should obey the truth in God's word in our relationships with our brothers and sisters in Christ. [34:13] That's the thing that is that is underscored here. God's word is not only the means by which we are born into God's family. It also tells us how we ought to treat the other members of God's family as well.

And that's an emphasis of Peter. And notice he does it negatively and then he does it positively as well. And it follows the pattern of Paul in Ephesians 4. The way to be putting off things and we're to be putting on things.

Well, we see that here. First of all, the putting off is at the beginning of chapter 2. If you'll notice verse 1 says putting aside all malice. What is malice?

The general idea of the word is badness. But a more specific idea is the idea of ill will. You're not desiring what's good for your neighbor.

You're desiring what's bad for them. That's malice. Putting aside also all deceit. Deceit has the idea of treachery. Trying to trick or fool another person for your own advantage or for your own purposes.

[35:18] And so it's a sinful thing. And then also putting aside. And these next three words actually are in the plural in the original. All hypocrisies. All acting like something's true.

It's not true of you. Putting on a front. Putting aside all envies. All torn up inside. Because somebody else has got something or getting something that I don't have. And putting aside all slanders. And literally that word slanders is speaking against. Putting aside all speaking against in a way that isn't edifying and building up. But instead is tearing down and bringing reproach and harm upon another person.

And so he says put those things all away. And what is the summation of all of those things? Are they not really unloving behavior? It's the opposite of love. It's instead really reflecting hatred in our hearts for others.

Instead of desiring their best. He says put that away. That unloving behavior that is there. And notice the way it's connected between verse 1 and 2. We're going to come to verse 2 in a moment.

[36:21] But it gives a clear implication here. That a key reason why it's so important to put away this kind of unloving behavior. Is that it will end up affecting our hunger for and our benefit from the word of God.

That if we are responding to people in an unloving way. Guess what? When you sit down and have your devotions. If you even do it. Because you don't feel like it now. That it will hinder you from profiting from.

And benefiting from. And wanting to be in the word of God. Well that's the negative. Put off that unloving behavior. But then notice. There's the positive that he gives. And that's back up in verse 22.

He says again at the end of verse 22. After he says God's already helped you to purify your hearts through obedience to the truth. To a fervent love. He says and go on ahead.

Fervently love one another. Fervently. With intensity. Not just coolly. Not indifferently. Fervently. Loving one another from the heart.

[37:24] Not just going through the motions outwardly. But really flowing from our hearts. A heart of love. For one another. He says keep on. Doing that. Growing in that love that has already begun.

Well that's the first thing. First thing we're called to do. Is keep obeying the truth in God's word. Especially in how we interact with one another in the spiritual family. And if there's a problem in that area. Problem with my attitude towards a brother or sister here this morning.

Peter's really clear isn't he? Put it off. Put it aside. Repent of it. Get rid of it. It's contrary to the gospel. It's contrary to the word of God.

And it's contrary to your benefit from and hungering for the word of God. And put on a fervent love for one another. And of course that isn't natural is it? We're all selfish by nature. So we've got to cry to the Lord.

To help us to do that. And to seek the help of his spirit. But notice the second thing that we're told. That we should be responding to the imperishable word of God. And it is that we should keep hungering for and feeding on God's word.

[38:27] We should keep hungering for and feeding upon God's word. Why? So that we fulfill the purpose for which the Lord Jesus saved us. And that is to grow up into mature believers.

And notice how we see that brought out in chapter 2 and verse 1. Verse 2 actually. Chapter 2 verse 2. Like newborn babies long for the pure milk of the word.

So that by it you may grow in respect to salvation. It says that when we come to the Bible. We should have an attitude like a newborn baby.

What's the newborn's baby attitude towards milk? Wah! He doesn't get it, right? I mean, unless there's something wrong with the child. It will cry and cry until it gets its milk.

And we ought to have that kind of an earnest intensity about having the word of God. The child's not satisfied unless he or she is fed. We should not be satisfied until we get our dose of the word of God on a daily basis at least.

[39:38] And in light of that kind of a command. It's good, isn't it, to ask ourselves as children of God here this morning. If you're a Christian. Do we reflect? Do I reflect a newborn baby in my perspective?

In my approach to God's word? Is that something that's true of me this morning? How does it show up in my devotions? I got an application of that really very quickly this morning.

It's interesting how God often helps you to apply your own preaching either ahead of time or afterwards. I did something I don't know if I've ever done before. I left behind my sword. This is a borrowed one from Pastor Heaney.

Didn't have my sword this morning. Well, I don't have my sword. It's got my notes in it. It tells me what I'm going to read next for my devotions. What am I preaching on this morning? Even if I didn't get a copy, borrow it.

I've got a computer. It has a Bible on it. I mean, there's ways. Am I going to stop and feed my soul upon the word of God this morning? Do we reflect that kind of a hunger for God?

[40:37] How is my devotions? Is it something that I hit and miss and, you know, if I get around to it? Or is it something that's, I've got to have this. There was a time when somebody that was close to me was complaining about, you guys all just feel like you've got a checklist.

You know, you've just got to do your checklist. I had my devotions today. And I really, I looked at him puzzled. I couldn't relate to what he was saying. I really couldn't. Yeah, I do have my devotions every day.

I said, it's not so I can check off my checklist and say, yeah, I did my brownie points for the day. I got to have it to survive. I'm going out into a wicked world.

I got a sinful, remaining sin in my heart. I need it for survival. This isn't a matter of checking off because I can tell pastor when I have a pastoral visit that, you know, I've been having my devotions. That's not it. It's so that I can survive today spiritually in the world with the flesh, the world and the devil. I have real enemies.

[41:38] I need to feed upon the Lord. How are we doing? How are we doing? Are we having time alone with God? Are we having time listening to him and then talking back to him? Other indications, and I know I'm getting the meddling a little bit, but I'm a visiting preacher, okay?

This is a problem in Grand Rapids. I preached the same sermon there last week, okay? So I eat my own cooking up in Grand Rapids, too. Do I hunger for the word enough that I'll show up for Sunday school? I don't know about you.

We're finding a trend that, now there are reasons where people can't. Health and so forth. I'm not talking about that. In fact, I find often it's younger people, not older people. Well, I get up in the morning.

Of course, well, I go to bed Saturday night so I can get up Sunday morning and come to Sunday school and profit from the word of God. Do I have a hunger to learn? As a student of Christ, that's what a disciple is. He's a student of Jesus Christ.

Do I have that kind of a hunger to learn from the word that I'll show up for Sunday school? And then, you do have an afternoon service, right? Evening, okay, evening service. Do I, I'm not saying you have, the Bible doesn't command it, okay?

[42:43] And there are different practices, but you do, okay? The doors are open, the word of God is going to be preached tonight. Do I have a hunger to come back and hear it again? Is that something that's true of me? And I think those are good questions, aren't they?

If you're in a place where the word of God is being preached, do I have a hunger for that word? And if I don't, then I need to be praying, Lord, search me, try me, forgive me, revive my soul.

I'm getting dull hearing, like it talks about in Hebrews. I'm getting, and this is a danger. I may have been a Christian now for nearly 55 years. God first worked in my life when I was five years old.

I've been in the church all my life. I've heard the word of God. I can get to taking it for granted and not realize this is a treasure. I have a great privilege to come and hear the word of God. And then, of course, there are good Christian books to read.

And there are good things you can listen. You can get online and listen about any preacher you want to today. It's incredible the ability that we have to feed upon the word of God. Do I reflect that in how I'm responding?

[43:45] Why should we hunger for the word of God? Why should we desire it? Why should we seek for God's word? Well, we're given a very crucial motivation here. Even as it's only through the word of God that we're born into God's family, it's only through the word of God we're going to grow up as Christians.

It's only through the word of God that I'm going to mature. And that spiritual growth is a very essential process by which we're going to reach. It talks about that language here. Our salvation, ultimate salvation or deliverance, is through that growing up into Christ.

Lensky writes this. And Lensky's not a Reformed Baptist. Lensky's a good old Lutheran. Okay. And he was. He's with the Lord now. But listen to Lensky's words. To cease longing for the divine milk is the most serious sign of spiritual decline, which soon ends in spiritual death.

Now, he doesn't mince any words. And then he goes back to the picture. A starved baby pales and dies. It doesn't happen immediately.

But it can happen pretty quick. Do I have that attitude towards the word of God? Why should I? So I can grow up. So I can reach ultimate salvation when Christ comes back again.

[45:07] Brothers and sisters, if we're Christians, we ought to want to grow. That ought to be our desire. Just like, I mean, the kids at church. I love them going by. Some of them are at that stage, you know, 12, 13, 14.

And every week I look at them, I think they've grown a foot, you know, and they want to grow up, you know, and be tall. And that's great. Do I want to grow up like a Christian? Do I want to grow up to maturity in Christ as well?

That should be my desire as well. And I ask you to turn to one other place where we're given crucial motivations to stay close to God's word. John 8, 31 to 32.

And this will be the last passage we turn to. It's one of my most frequently turned to passages in counseling in difficult cases where there have been lifelong patterns of sin. John 8, 31 and 32.

Jesus is speaking here. He says, So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed him, If you continue in my word, then you are truly disciples of mine and you will know the truth and the truth will make you free.

[46:14] And the context is free from sin in particular. And so our Lord here. Notice we talked about the word of God remaining or abiding. Well, guess what? The same words here, but someone else is supposed to be abiding now.

Now, we're supposed to be abiding with the word. And as we abide with Christ's words, there are some wonderful motivations here. And we need that, don't we? Godly motivations.

And one of those motivations is your disciples indeed. If you abide in my word, guess what? That shows you're a Christian. You're struggling with assurance of your salvation. You know one of the best things you could be doing?

Reading this book. And as you abide in Christ's word, guess what? If you are a Christian, you're going to have faith strengthened more and more. And you're going to say, yes, I am a Christian. These things are true of me. Yes, not the way they ought to be. Yes, with remaining sin. But I am what isn't described in these passages. And so you abide in Christ's word.

[47:08] You're his disciples indeed. There's a strengthening of assurance. But then there's something more. You're growing and understanding the truth of the word of God. You're going to know the truth. You're going to grow in that habit in your heart, in your mind.

And as you do that, as you meditate upon it, then what will it do? It will set you free. You may be saying there's that area of sin in my life and it's got me around the throat. And I can't ever, I just can't seem to deal with it. I can't seem to address it.

What do I do? Get back to this book. Abide in this book. Is it going to be automatic? You know, you just boom and it's over? No, not usually. It doesn't usually work that way.

Sanctification is a process. It's growing, remember? It's growing. It's maturing. But stay with this book. Don't just also, you know, sit down.

I read my chapter today. Lay it aside. Off we go. Don't even think about it. Meditate upon it. If you're not too old to be able to remember it, memorize it. Okay. And even you're 60, you can still try.

[48:04] Okay. Even if it does get away quickly. But focus upon the word of God. Keep remaining with it. It will help set you free over time, gradually, more and more from patterns of wrong thinking, which is behind wrong acting.

And as you stay close to the word of God. Well, final application for believers today. God's word is imperishable, child of God.

It's never going to pass away. It's never going to change. It's descriptions of who God is and who we are don't change. It's commands don't change. It's warnings don't change.

Bless God. It's promises don't change. The word of God will never let us down. We're living in a world that's temporary. We are living in a world that we're surrounded by things that are passing away.

The word of God in this world that's passing away is a solid rock that you can build your faith upon. It is a solid rock that is continuing on to be a foundation for our lives now and a foundation for the life to come in eternity.

[49:10] No matter what happens to you, the word of God will still be there. It still will remain the same. It doesn't matter what trial you're facing.

It doesn't change. Last Sunday, I was in that unusual situation, and I mentioned this in Sunday school, where I was awaiting the results of a biopsy, looking to see if I had prostate cancer.

So last Sunday night, as I was preaching this, I said, you know what? Next week when I get my biopsy report, and the people knew about it, asked their prayer for that. Next week when I get my report, you know, whatever the report is, this book will still be the same.

It will be unchanged. Well, I got the report back. I do have cancer, and we're working through that, and hopefully it's a good prognosis. They don't want to overreact or make a melodramatic about it. But now I'm waiting for the bone scan to see if it's spread.

You know what? It's still true. When I get that report this next week, no matter what the report is, this book will be true. It doesn't go away. It doesn't matter whatever God and his good providence brings into your life, child of God.

[50:17] You can root your soul upon what our Lord has given us in his word. It will not change. And as I close, I would just ask those of you who may not know the Lord that are here today.

And I would ask you, where do things stand with you? What do you got that's solid? What do you have that's going to be around when everything's over? What do you have that's substantial, that's imperishable?

What are you relying on? You know, one of the things that we can tend to rely on is, well, yesterday I got up and everything was okay and I was in good health.

And the day before that I got up and everything was okay. And the devil's like, and be well, tomorrow will just be the same. And the next day will be the same. And the next day will be the same. And you know, everything's okay.

And I don't need to worry. And on we go and just forget it. No, it isn't always going to stay the same. I'm sorry. If you're drinking that acid-laced Kool-Aid of the devil, my friend, spit it out.

[51:20] Things are not going to always stay the same. There is a day coming. Either you're going to face a returning Christ before you die, or you're going to die and go face God.

And you cannot escape it. And you know if you stop long enough that that is reality. We live in a passing away world. The world's going to burn up one day.

The heavens are going to roll up. There's going to be a whole new universe. Please don't be a fool. Don't keep marching along saying, everything's great, no problems.

When eternity could be just one breath away. My friend, don't, don't push away the gospel. Don't push away Jesus Christ.

Christ, this is the only rock. He in his shed blood is the only rock that you can base your life upon that isn't going to fail you and go away. Hang upon the Lord Jesus.

[52:18] Go to him today. If you're lost, you don't know him. Go to him today and say, Lord, even if you have to do what my wife did when she was an agnostic 25-year-old, just simply say, Lord, if you're there, show yourself to me.

God hears prayers like that. Go to him. Cry to him for mercy. And he will have mercy upon your soul. May the Lord help us to take to heart the things that we've seen in his word this morning. Let's pray. Father, we thank you for your word. We thank you for the way in which it addresses us right where we are, right where we live. We thank you for the way that it does not pull any punches, that it talks about the things that are perishable as well as the things that are imperishable. Lord, we thank you that there are things that are imperishable and that we can have them as our own possession. We thank you for your word. We thank you that it is a rock that will never pass away.

Pray, oh God, you'd help us who are your children to hang on to it, to abide in it, to long for it, to hunger for it. Forgive us, Lord, when we have been tempted or given into the temptation to ignore it today, maybe for days on end.

[53:26] Help us, oh Lord, to grow as Christians through our constant contact with your word. We pray, Lord, that you would help us to grow in our love for one another through our constant contact with your word.

We pray for those who do not know you, that they might come to deal honestly with what you have told us. And Lord, to see their own condition, their own lostness before you, that they'd be brought to see a glorious Savior who's died for sinners and embrace him before it's too late.

We pray this in Christ's name. Amen. Amen.