

1 PETER 1:22-25

THE LIVING AND ETERNAL WORD

“Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, 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,
but the word of the Lord remains forever.’

And this word is the good news that was preached to you.”¹

Faith and practise are determined by what one accepts as authoritative for life. Whether conscious of the fact or not, everyone has an authority for the conduct of his or her life. Some individuals submit to the consensus of their peers as the authority for life’s choices. For such people, this is a sort of acceptance of the lowest common denominator for the manner in which life is lived. Unfortunately, this choice can become a way to dumb down convictions as practitioners attempt to avoid hurting anyone’s feelings. Other individuals see human government as authoritative. This particular view is often advocated by individuals promoting socialistic government (almost always some form of an oligarchy, if not a kakistocracy or a kleptocracy) as being wiser than the individual. In the estimate of such individuals, pseudo-aristocrats (so designated because of their exalted socialistic views) rule because they have established themselves as the authority for the masses. One modern view that has gained ascendancy within contemporary society (and even among the churches of our Lord) argues that whatever one “feels” is authoritative. Thus, emotions become a tyrant dictating life’s choices.

Ours is a Baptist congregation. As stated in an earlier message, the term “Baptist” is not one that we chose, though we embrace that name in this present day. The name was given in derision to our forebears; the name was conferred because of their insistence upon a regenerate church membership. In reality, however, we are not Baptists because we insist upon baptism as a mark of the new birth rather than reducing the rite to a contrived effort to obtain the new birth. Our convictions arise from an even more basic belief. We are convinced that the Word of God is authoritative for faith and practise. Where the Bible is silent, we have no warrant to speak. Where God has spoken, we are obligated to obey.

I find it fascinating to observe the role assigned to the Word of God in salvation. Peter claims that the New Birth is accomplished through “the living and abiding Word of God.” What a powerful statement is attributed to the Word of God! It is that Word that is the focus of the remainder of the message this day. For us as Baptists, the Word of God is received as inerrant and infallible; the Word of God is authoritative and accurate. Our hope is grounded in the Word of God, and our Faith is firmly established on the firm foundation that is the Word of God. Focus with me for these brief moments on this Living and Abiding Word of God.

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible, English Standard Version** © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

THE WORD OF GOD IS LIVING — Peter is writing to believers. This is obvious from the opening words of the text. He addresses those who have “purified [their] souls by obedience to the truth” [VERSE 22]. Therefore, they are the same individuals who have been born again [VERSE 23]. In order to ensure that we are all on the same page, I remind you that the New Birth refers to the results of faith in Christ the Lord. The term, “born again” was used by Jesus when He was approached by a member of the Jewish ruling body, the Sanhedrin. The account of that interview and the response of the Master is found in **JOHN 3:3-15**.

“Jesus [said to Nicodemus], ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.’ Nicodemus said to him, ‘How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?’ Jesus answered, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.’

“Nicodemus said to him, ‘How can these things be?’ Jesus answered him, ‘Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things? Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony. If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.’”

The new birth becomes a reality through faith in Jesus. To be born again is to be saved; it is to receive the forgiveness of sin. One Scripture that I frequently cite is **ROMANS 10:9, 10**. Here, the Apostle instructs those who are reading this particular letter, “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.”

Those who have been born again reveal that they have been born from above through “obedience to the truth.” Those who are twice born will identify with Christ through receiving baptism as a testimony of their faith, and they will seek out a fellowship of believers where they will grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. By this means, they demonstrate love for Christ who has redeemed them. Simultaneously, they also demonstrate a “sincere brotherly love” for the people of God.

The expression of love for the people of God is to be demonstrated through investment of one’s life in a community of the Faith where each believer will participate in the work of building one another up through exercise of the spiritual gifts God has given each Christian. John says of those who are twice-born, “By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.

“For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother’s righteous. Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you. We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.

“By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers” [1 JOHN 3:10-16].

HEBREWS 10:23-25 sums up the expression of love expected toward our brothers. “Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.” Love is expressed through union with God’s people and through communion with Christ. Those who refuse to openly unite with God’s people for worship and for service are revealing that they have not been born again. Salvation does not lie in the church, but those saved will seek out a congregation of God’s people at earliest opportunity.

Sometimes I fear that we Christians unconsciously pass over the various statements found in the Word of God. For instance, what does it mean to you when the Bible declares that the Word of God is living? Each of us has no doubt at some time read that “the Word of God is living and active” [HEBREWS 4:12], and the text affirms this same truth. But what does it mean when God declares that His Word is living? Does the Word of God breathe? Does it multiply and interact with us, as might any sentient being? We need to understand what Peter means when he says the Word of God is living.

In order to discover Peter’s meaning it will be necessary for us to think through the effects of the Word of God on the life of an individual. As I already pointed out, and now iterate, Peter is focusing our attention on the fact that his readers are those who have been born again. He knew they had been born again because they were obedient to the command of God. Edwin Blum writes, “The Good News carries with it a command to repent and believe. In the early church, this was commonly tied to baptism. Not that the church believed that baptism itself saved; rather, it was the focal point of decision.”²

For the early Christians, baptism was no mere rite, but it was a dramatic demonstration of obedience—radical obedience—to God. Having been born from above through faith in Christ, they openly identified with Him, and as the redeemed of the Lord, they loved God’s holy people. They were now called to “love one another earnestly from a pure heart.” It is difficult to judge love for God by one’s religious actions. Perhaps we can take note of participation at the Lord’s Table, even when it is inconvenient. Perhaps we can register attendance at the services of the church. Perhaps we can keep a tally of giving to determine if the individual is generous toward God. Though all these things may speak of love for God, they are not the means by which God calls us to show our love for Him.

How do you express love for God? One answer is found in Peter’s call for believers to “love **one another** with a pure heart.” Love for God is expressed through love for God’s redeemed people. It is not love for the world, but rather love for the people of God that reveals whether we are in love with God. Listen as John writes concerning practical aspects of this truth. “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us” [1 JOHN 4:7-12].

² Edwin Blum, 1 Peter, in Frank E. Gaebelin (ed.), **The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, Volume 12** (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI 1981) 226

We could summarise by saying, “we love because He first loved us” [1 JOHN 4:19]. Christians who are born again are changed by the new birth. The Word of God, which is the self-revelation of God Himself, has taught us of Him and informed us of His love. That Word is “living and active” [HEBREWS 4:12], and it exposed the intentions of our heart. His Word has given us life [see PSALM 33:9]. The Word of God always fulfils His purposes [see ISAIAH 55:10, 11].

So, the Word of God is living, since it is the revelation of God Himself. John, speaking of the Christ in his Gospel, affirms that “in Him was life.” In itself, this is a powerful statement, but John continues by stating that “the Life was the light of men” [JOHN 1:4]. Christ and the Word of God are so closely identified with one another that He is identified as the Word of God [REVELATION 19:13; cf. JOHN 1:1].

Moses gave the Law to Israel. When he had given the full Law, he spoke these words. “Take to heart all the words by which I am warning you today, that you may command them to your children, that they may be careful to do all the words of this law. For it is no empty word for you, but your very life, and by this word you shall live long in the land that you are going over the Jordan to possess” [DEUTERONOMY 32:46, 47].

The Psalmist attested that it was God’s Word that gave life [PSALM 119:25, 107]. Peter testified that Christ had the “words of eternal life” [JOHN 6:68]. Paul speaks of the Scriptures as “the word of life” [PHILIPPIANS 2:16]. When he begins his first epistle, John spoke of Christ in this manner. “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us—that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ” [1 JOHN 1:1-3].

If you will be truly alive, you must heed the Word that is life. This is truly the Living Word since it gives us life and since it guides us into life. That is the reason that we value the Word of God. Unlike Islamic idolaters, we do not worship the Bible and therefore threaten with death those who reject it or those who speak ill of it. Instead, we preach the Word and teach the Word, knowing that because it is alive, it will have its perfect work in even the most obdurate heart. We use the Word to persuade people.

I have on occasion related a story of a Chinese boy whose father had raised a tiger from a cub. The Tiger, now fully grown, was kept in a cage in the front yard of the family home. Neighbour children would taunt the tiger and tease the boy, saying that the tiger was nothing but a big, harmless pussycat. They laughingly insisted that the tiger couldn’t hurt anyone, despite the child’s protests that the tiger was truly dangerous. His insistence of the tiger’s ferocity only fuelled the children’s derision and mockery.

One day, the child had been pushed to the point that he would no longer take the ridicule concerning his tiger. As the children jeered him, he walked to the cage and putting his hand on the door latch of the cage, he said, “I warn you that this is a ferocious tiger. He will eat you.” Of course, he now had the attention of every child. As he lifted the latch on the cage, he calmly asked, “Want to try my tiger?”

We make no threats and we do not respond with choler to insults to this Word. We simply unleash the Word and let it do its effective work. When unbelievers ridicule this Word, God commands us to continue living as His holy people, letting the Word have its way with the hearts of mankind.

THE WORD OF GOD IS ENDURING — Just as God asserts that His Word is *living*, so He also attests that His Word is *abiding*. Whenever we hear the term “abiding,” we perhaps think of the eternal nature of God, and we should think of the eternal nature of the Word He has given. To be certain, the Word of God is eternal, that is, it shall not be brought to an end as will other writings considered sacred by their devotees, such as the Qur’an, the Book of Mormon, Dianetics or the Bhagavad-Gita. The Psalmist sings,

“Forever, O LORD, your word
is firmly fixed in the heavens.”

[PSALM 119:89]

In yet another verse of this delightful paean of praise to the Word of God, David writes,

“The entirety of Your word is truth,
and all Your righteous judgments endure forever.”³

[PSALM 119:160]

Peter emphasises the eternal nature of God’s Word again in our text for this day. After citing the Prophet Isaiah [see **ISAIAH 40:6, 8**], the preacher of Pentecost, no doubt recalling the Master’s promise, says that “the Word of the Lord remains forever” [**1 PETER 1:25**]. In order to understand the reason I insist that Peter’s reference is to Jesus, I invite you to refresh your memory of an occasion when our Lord spoke of His Second Coming, warning of what must occur in days to come. He solemnly affirmed the veracity of His words in this powerful manner, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will never pass away” [**MATTHEW 24:35**]. Undoubtedly, the Master was here affirming that His Word is eternal and shall never fail. Similarly, Peter believed that the Word of God is eternal.

However, when Peter chose the word that is translated “abiding” in **VERSE 23**, he intended to convey something more than merely the eternal nature of this divine Word. The word “abiding” is translated in many newer translations of the Bible by our English word “enduring.”⁴ Perhaps “abiding” is less colourful in contemporary language than is “enduring,” but what does seem to be in Peter’s mind is the unchanging nature of the Word of God instead of simply speaking of its continued existence. This is not merely an issue of semantics, but it is rather a statement intended to instil confidence in those who read the words he has written.

Christ is enduring; He does not change. Instead, His relationship to His people is constant. Because of His immutable nature, the Word of our Lord is also enduring—unchanging, continuing, permanent, abiding. In the letter to the Hebrews is found one verse that is a great encouragement whenever I read it. Listen to **HEBREWS 7:25**, refreshing your memory of the permanence of Christ and the permanence of His salvation. “[Jesus] is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.” With God, “there is no variation or shadow due to change” [see **JAMES 1:17**]. Having affirmed this truth, the brother of our Lord continues by informing we Christians that we were “brought forth by the Word of Truth” [**JAMES 1:18**]; this is “the living and abiding Word of God.”

The author of the Hebrews letter speaks of the unchanging nature of our Lord when He cites the Psalmist [cf. **PSALM 102:25-27**].

³ **Holman Christian Standard Bible**, Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2003. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

⁴ See, e.g., the **New American Standard Version**, **Holman Christian Standard Version**, **New International Version**

“You, Lord, laid the foundation of the earth in the beginning,
and the heavens are the work of your hands;
they will perish, but you remain;
they will all wear out like a garment,
like a robe you will roll them up,
like a garment they will be changed.
But you are the same,
and your years will have no end.”

[HEBREWS 1:10-12]

The immutability of Christ, the unchanging nature of His promises, the abiding nature of His Word—all alike are intertwined and cannot be separated. The Word of God will continue to exist; and the promises of God delivered through that Word will be fulfilled. Does God promise eternal life to each individual who looks to Jesus in faith? Then those who look to Christ will be forever saved and freed from the power of sin. Has God promised blessing and good for His people? We are confident that He will fulfil His promise, showing mercy and kindness, granting joy and peace to all who seek His face. Does God promise power to those who honour Him? You may be assured that God will demonstrate His power through those who seek to honour Him—power to live a holy life, power to redeem those who believe the message of life we deliver, power to glorify His Name. Has God pledged to judge wickedness? Then, we may be certain that wickedness will be judged and that all the wicked shall be turned into hell.

There is another side to this issue of the enduring Word of God that is equally important. Just as the Word is enduring, so those who have believed this Word will abide in the Word. What is meant by this statement is that all who receive the promise of God for life and the forgiveness of sin will remain in the Word of God. In fact, this is a distinguishing mark of those who are born from above. John identifies those who are mere pretenders to grace when he writes, “Everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God. Whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son” [2 JOHN 9].

This answers the unspoken question of whether the child of God remains in Christ *in order to be saved* or whether he remains in Christ because he *has been saved*. Anyone who attempts to be Christian in order to be forgiven and saved will be disappointed. Such an individual hasn’t sufficient power to keep himself or herself saved. However, those who are transformed by the power of the indwelling Spirit because they have believed the message of life will continue in Christ because they have been born into His Family.

Once you have believed Christ, you will be forever saved. Those who are born from above cannot and will not be unborn at some future point. The redeemed no longer are compelled to continue to believe in order to “stay” saved; rather, because they are saved, they will continue to believe. We are redeemed “through the living and abiding Word of God,” and therefore, so long as the Word of God continues, all who have believed will remain saved.

In our world, the only constant is change. The hymn writer wisely observed:

Change and decay in all around I see,
O Thou who changest not, abide with me.

There is nothing permanent. Even the “truths” we thought we knew are liable to change. However, the Word of God stands firm because the God who gave the Word is unchanging. We have been born again of imperishable seed, “through the living and abiding Word of God.” This thought comforts me and should serve to comfort all who believe.

THE WORD OF GOD IS GOOD NEWS — Peter concludes his encouraging focus on the Word of God by reminding us that “this is the Good News that was preached to you.” Technically, the Bible is not the Gospel, but the Gospel constitutes the warp and the woof of the Word of God. As you listen to the Word of God—whether it is as you read that Word or whether it is during the preaching of the Word—the Word is at work, transforming your soul, either confronting you and calling you to faith or changing you into the image of Christ.

What is meant whenever someone speaks of a “Gospel message” or when someone states that a preacher is a “Gospel preacher?” I trust that whenever we use such terms that we do not mean that every sermon is the Gospel. Rather, I trust that we do mean that the preacher is able to follow the scarlet thread throughout the Bible. I would hope that we mean that he is able to see Christ on every page of the Word, tracing the condemnation of fallen man even as we witness the sentence of death that has been set aside through the mercy and grace of Christ Jesus the Lord. Therefore, though not technically **the Gospel**, the Word of God is nevertheless **Good News**.

For the outsider, God’s Word is used by the Spirit of God to convict of sin, of righteousness and of judgement to come. Convicted the Spirit working through the Word of God, the outsider is taught of the mercies of God in Christ the Lord through the Word and drawn to see the freedom offered in the Son of God. The Word of God, living and abiding as it is, has throughout a consistent theme of man’s ruin by the Fall, redemption of sinners by the sacrifice of Christ the Lord, and regeneration through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. For a brief moment, focus on this Good News. We are sinners by birth and by choice. The Word of God declares of each member of the race that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” [ROMANS 3:23].

In fact, it is worse than that. Because we are sinful people, we do sinful deeds. Paul brings to bear a number of Scriptural statements to convince us of this sad truth.

“None is righteous, no, not one;
no one understands;
no one seeks for God.
All have turned aside; together they have become worthless;
no one does good,
not even one.’
‘Their throat is an open grave;
they use their tongues to deceive.’
‘The venom of asps is under their lips.’
‘Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.’
‘Their feet are swift to shed blood;
in their paths are ruin and misery,
and the way of peace they have not known.’
‘There is no fear of God before their eyes.’”

[ROMANS 3:10-18]

Consequently, the whole of society is contaminated and cannot be permanently bettered through human effort because the people making up society are contaminated at heart.

The Bible warns of the consequences of sin when it reminds us that “sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned” [ROMANS 5:12]. If one is inclined to question this dark assessment of mankind, I need but remind you of the statistics concerning death—one out of one of us die. Life is terminal! All who reject the biblical assessment face a dark unknown, and the Word of God warns us that just as there is a physical death (the separation of the soul from the body), so there is also spiritual death (the separation of the spirit from God who is life).

In our weakness, facing death without a cure and knowing that judgement without hope follows death in the natural world, we are compelled to seek help. The Word of God declares Christ has provided that divine assistance. “While we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” [ROMANS 5:6-8].

Therefore, the Good News tells us what God has done as result of our sinful condition. The Good News begins with bad news, but it is the severity of the bad news that makes the Good News so good. Therefore, the Bible emphatically declares, “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. For the Scripture says, ‘Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.’ For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For ‘everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved’” [ROMANS 10:9-13].

Eternal life and everlasting hope is offered to all in Christ Jesus the Lord. Some sharing the service this day have spent so much time in the world that they are utterly blinded to the goodness of God. They have taken for granted His mercies and presumed against His grace; they are unconscious of their peril. Nevertheless, such people know that they must one day face death. They know that they have nothing more than a vague hope that things will somehow “work out” when they pass beyond the pale of this life.

Nevertheless, the issue can be settled now. Today, on the authority of God’s Word, I assure each listener that God stands ready to forgive your sin and to receive you into His eternal Kingdom. You, too, can be born of imperishable seed through the living and abiding Word of God. You need but believe that Christ died because of your sin and that He has been raised to declare you free of all condemnation. If you will thus receive the Risen Son of God as Master over your life, believing that He died because of your sin, you will be born from above. Together with all the saints of the ages, you will be assured of a home in Heaven, assured of receiving the forgiveness of sin, and assured that you will enter into life everlasting.

Do it now. Do it this day. Believe this message of life and be born from above, even today. May God Himself direct your steps as you find your way into His Kingdom. Amen.