

SPIRITUAL POISON DESTROYS THE HEART

I Peter 2:1-3

INTRODUCTION:

Lady Nancy Astor was the first woman to sit as a member of England's Parliament. It has been reported that she and Sir Winston Churchill did not get along very well. During one heated discussion between these two firebrands, Lady Astor supposedly said, "Winston, if I were your wife, I'd put poison in your coffee." "Aw, Nancy," replied Churchill, "and if I were your husband, I'd drink it."

I do not know if that story is true or if it is fable. But I know that this is true: whether we know it or not, most of us willingly take poison that is killing our souls. This morning, I want to expose the poison.

In I Peter 2:1-3, Simon Peter warns us of some poison we must eliminate from our diet. Simon Peter writes: *"¹ Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. ² Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, ³ now that you have tasted that the Lord is good."*

You may have heard of the series of books titled **Eat This, Not That**. The series began as a magazine column in *Men's Health*. It expanded into a line of books advising healthier alternatives to common food choices. The series has also generated a "Worst Foods in America List". The authors are happy to sell you information about the lowest calorie banana split or the healthiest pizza or the fast-food sandwich with the least fat grams.

The apostle Peter gives us a list of "Eat This, Not That". On his "Eat This" list, he has one thing: *pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good*. His figure of speech is that just as babies crave milk because they instinctively know it nourishes them, we should crave spiritual nourishment. For the last month or so, I have been preaching about those things that nourish our hearts, our souls and our spirits.

But Peter doesn't just give us an "Eat This" list; he also gives us a "Not That" list. These are the spiritual toxins or the spiritual poison that we are to avoid. In the Garden of Eden, Satan came to Eve in the guise of a serpent inflicting his venom on mankind. The ancient serpent is still claiming victims with his deadly poison.

I. **MALICE IS POISON TO THE SOUL**

The Greek word translated as "malice" is a general word for any and every kind of wickedness. In the previous few verses, Peter has written that when we came to Christ, we purified ourselves because we obeyed the

truth. Having purified ourselves, Peter does not want us to go back and soil what has been made clean.

The great apostle also says that when we accepted Jesus as our Lord, we were born again by eternal, everlasting seed. His appeal is that we not introduce anything toxic into this new and healthy person that we now are.

I can remember a man in a church where I once served. He had lived a very unhealthy lifestyle including chain-smoking cigarettes, drinking alcohol in excess, using illicit drugs and engaging in promiscuous sex. Eventually some of his internal organs began to fail because of all the abuses. He had a surgery that removed one lung and much of another and he also received a liver transplant. His doctor told him he had been given a new chance and a new start and that he absolutely must avoid all those destructive behaviors. His doctor warned him that because his body was weakened and the internal organs were vulnerable, his next cigarette or his next alcoholic drink could very well kill him. I suspect you can guess the rest of the story. As soon as he was able to get out of bed and walk, he walked out the front door of the hospital, still in his hospital gown and dragging a stand with his IV's hung on them and when he got outside, he lit a cigarette and smoked it. I know because I was there. I know because he asked me to buy him another pack of cigarettes and some beer.

How utterly foolish to have the diseased portions of his lungs removed and to be given a clean liver and then to poison them all over again! But people do that with their souls, don't they...don't **we**?

- We are washed clean by the blood of Jesus and we go back out and wallow in sin.
- We are given a new heart by The Great Physician and then we clog it with the same old unhealthy diet of spiritual pollution that ruined our heart before.
- We are born again into the family of God and we have a clean slate: we are as innocent as a newborn babe and then we make the same wrong choices we were making before we were given a fresh start.

The apostle Peter urges: don't stain what has been made clean...don't ruin what has been made healthy. Rid yourself of all malice and wickedness.

II. **DECEIT IS POISON TO THE SOUL**

Peter uses an interesting word for the next poison in his list. The Greek word is δολος. Doesn't mean a thing to you, does it? But it meant a lot to Peter. If you know about Simon's early life, you probably remember that he was a fisherman. We usually think of Peter, Andrew, James and John as fishermen who used nets. And they did. We know they did because

we often read about them mending their nets or cleaning their nets or casting their nets into the sea to catch fish.

But just because they used nets to catch fish commercially does not mean that was the only way they knew to fish. They lived by the sea and worked on the sea and I suspect they knew the way of the sea very well. They would have been very familiar with the process of fishing with a line and a hook. And they would have known that a bare hook doesn't catch many fish. To catch the prey, the fisherman needed to use bait.

When Peter wrote that we are to rid ourselves of all deceit, he used the word *δολος* and that was a fishing term that meant to catch with bait. Peter is telling us that we are to stop baiting people to try to hook, trap or entangle them.

Behind this is the knowledge that some people deliberately try to deceive others so they can achieve their own ends.

- They bait you with flattery so they can hook you into doing what they want you to do.
- They bait you with guilt so they can manipulate you to do their bidding.
- They bait you with half-truths so they can trick you into doing something you would not have done if you had known the whole story.
- They bait you with a sob story so you will feel sorry for them and become entangled in their lives in ways that you otherwise would never have been.
- They bait you with a variety of deceptions so that you don't know there even is a hook until it is firmly set and you can't get away.

But interestingly, Simon Peter is not warning us about being caught by the hooks of others; he is commanding that we stop doing that, ourselves. Apparently in the church to which Peter was writing, there was a problem with some trying to bait and hook their brothers and sisters in Christ. And Peter says to stop it. Get rid of such manipulative behavior. It poisons the church and it is poison to your soul because it makes you a user of people and not a servant of people. We are called to serve one another, not use one another.

III. HYPOCRISY IS POISON TO THE SOUL

A third poison Simon Peter lists is hypocrisy. Again, there is some interesting linguistic background to the Greek word that Peter chooses. *ὑποκρισις* can be translated "pretense" as well as "hypocrisy" and the word comes from the world of the theatre. In the Greek theatre, actors often played multiple parts – sometimes even within the same scene. Also, at that time, all the actors were male so the female roles were played by male actors. To be able to pull off the quick changes of characters and so that men could play female roles, actors routinely wore masks so the

audience would know the part they were playing. These masks were called ὑποκρισις. And it was not long before the term was applied to anyone who sought to hide his real self behind a façade.

I suspect we all wear some masks. Some act like clowns so we won't see their hurt. Some talk religious talk so we won't see their doubts. Some hide their insecurities behind a mask of noisy, talkative, brashness. We all wear masks.

When we won't let people know of our hurts, our needs and our insecurities, they can't reach out to us and help us. They can't demonstrate that they love us.

Peter doesn't just tell us to drop the masks, he tells us to cast them away from us.

Now I want to say something else about masks that will take us in a little different direction. Peter said we are to get rid of all hypocrisy. As you well know, the number one reason that people give for not getting involved in a local church is "because of all the hypocrites". As they use that term, they do not mean people who wear masks so you will not know they are hurting. As they use that term, they mean people who pretend to be better than they really are.

I've gone on record before as saying that I don't think there are a lot of hypocrites in the church. Oh, sure, there are some. And over time, we've come to know who most of them are. But I don't think the church is so much full of hypocrites as it is full of failures. Most of us are fully aware that we have not measured up to the standard Jesus set for us in his life and in his teaching. We are not pretending to be perfect. In fact, we are so up-front about our failure that we have stood before a room full of people, we have confessed that we are sinners and we have accepted the forgiveness that Jesus has offered us. And even then, we have to acknowledge that we still stumble, we still falter and we still fail to be like Jesus – so we ask for forgiveness yet again.

By all means, Peter demands that we drop the mask of pretense that we don't sin, that we don't need a savior and that we don't need forgiveness. Such hypocrisy is poison to our soul...and to the souls of others, too.

IV. JEALOUSY IS POISON TO THE SOUL

Peter says that envy is poison to the soul. Envy is defined as begrudging another something he has that you do not have. He has some possession, some feature, some quality or some characteristic that you would like to have so you envy him.

William Barclay has suggested that envy may be the last sin to die. It was by envy that Satan tempted Eve to eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil so that she could become like God. Envy even reared its ugly head among the band of the apostles when ten were envious of James and John whom they thought had a favored relationship with Jesus. Why, even at the Last Supper, the apostles were arguing about who should get to sit in the places of greatest honor.

Envy is toxic to the soul because it breeds discontent with the blessings we have received. It leads to a lack of gratitude and ultimately can turn into bitterness. No wonder Peter says to cast envy aside: it is poison to your soul.

V. UNKIND SPEECH IS POISON TO THE SOUL

The apostle Peter also tells us to get rid of slander. Slander is unkind speech. To slander is to run down or disparage another – whether what we say is true or not.

Gossip is seductive, isn't it? We want people to think we are in the know so we tell them what we know...even if we don't really know what we are telling them. Unkind speech is seductive because we seem to think that by pointing out the flaws in another, we are taking the focus off of our own. We drop our voice and whisper the rumors, the innuendo and the scandal and, for a moment at least, people seem to hang on our every word. That's heady. That's addictive. That's habit-forming.

But can I tell you a secret. Nobody likes a gossip. Everyone deplores the malicious talk, the slander and the mean-spirited chatter. Don't misunderstand – they find it interesting and they lean in to hear every word but even while they are doing it, they feel filthy because they know they are participating in something that is very cheap, very tawdry and very wrong.

Slander poisons the Body of Christ...and it poisons your soul. If you've been doing it, stop it. Cast it aside. Get rid of that noxious poison because it kills.

CONCLUSION:

In the Garden of Eden, Eve ate that which was poison to her soul. Then she gave it to Adam and encouraged him to eat the poison, too. Since then, we've all tasted the toxic fruit. And as a result, spiritually, each of us is dying. But the Bible reveals that there is an antidote to the poison: the blood of Jesus. The blood of Jesus Christ is the only cure. Will you admit you need it? Will you accept it?

INVITATION: #323 – *“At The Cross”*