

Let's Grow Up
1 Peter 2:1-3
Pastor John Miller

I want to get a running start on chapter 2 by going back to the end of chapter 1. The end of chapter 1 will tie in to the beginning of chapter 2.

In 1 Peter 1:23-25 to 2:3, Peter says, "...having been born again, not of corruptible seed by incorruptible, through the Word of God, which lives and abides forever, because 'all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, and its flower falls away, but the Word of the Lord endures forever.' Now this is the Word which by the Gospel..."—or "the good news"—"...was preached to you. Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the Word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious."

Several years ago, I heard of a new syndrome that we have now in America. It's called the "Peter Pan syndrome." It's a pop-psychology concept of an adult, usually a male, who is socially immature. It's like a person who doesn't want to grow up. According to Urban Dictionary, the word "maniscent" describes a man of any age who shirks responsibility.

It reminded me of the fact that a lot of Christians are suffering from the Peter Pan syndrome; they don't want to grow up. They are spiritual "maniscent." They don't want to take responsibility. They don't want to mature as believers.

I believe that Peter is writing these very words in chapter 2, verse 2, "As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the Word, that you may grow thereby." Peter is talking to us about how to grow. We, as believers, should want to mature and grow up.

In 1 Corinthians 13:11, Paul says, "When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things." So we need to grow and we need to mature.

The question I want to ask you is, "Are you growing?" It's one thing to be a Christian for many years, but it's another thing to grow spiritually. You might be old in the Lord, but you're not maturing in the Lord. There is a difference between being a Christian for a long time and being a mature Christian. I've seen young Christians who have just come to the Lord outgrow older Christians who have walked with God for years, simply because the older Christians don't respond to the Word properly. Those who do respond properly grow and become what God wants them to be. So God wants us to grow.

In our text, Peter gives us three simple steps in how to grow as a Christian. This is by no means exhaustive; there are a lot of ways in which we grow and mature in our walk with the Lord. The first step is to lay aside that which hinders us. Notice it in chapter 2, verse 1:

“Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking.”

Peter opens chapter 2 with a “therefore.” That takes us back to chapter 1, verse 23. That’s the reason I started in verse 23. Verse 23 says, “...having been born again, not of corruptible seed...”—that is, it’s not your natural birth—“...but incorruptible, through the Word of God, which lives and abides forever.” When you became a Christian, you became one because you were born again. (Now this is simple, but I have to make it very clear.) The only individuals who are really Christians are those who are born again. You cannot be a Christian unless you are born again; and if you are born again, you are a Christian.

So my question to you is, “Have you been born again? Have you been born by the Spirit of God?” Not the first, natural birth, but the second, supernatural birth. In John 3, Jesus told Nicodemus, a very religious, Jewish man, that “You must be born again. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” You need to be born of the Spirit. When we are born again, we are reborn by the Word of God and the Spirit of God. Just as in natural birth, there is the seed and the egg, they come together and conception takes place, so, too, in our spiritual conception there is the Spirit of God and the Word of God, which come together in our hearts, and we are given new life.

The theological and technical term for this new birth is “regeneration.” The Bible says that we are washed in the water of His Word “through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit.” The Holy Spirit and the Word of God bring new life into the individual. So you’ve been born of the Spirit and become a child of God.

I’ve said all that so we’ll be clear that only those who are born again are children of God in the family of God. And only those individuals have God as their Father in heaven. When Jesus said that we should pray, “Our Father who art in heaven,” the question is, “Is God your Father? Have you been born into God’s family?” If so, then now you need to grow. When we have children, we want them to grow. And God wants us to grow. So we need to “lay aside.”

The picture of “laying aside” in verse 1 is a picture of taking off a piece of clothing that is soiled. It has the idea of “getting rid of” or of “taking off.” When you came to church this morning, you probably didn’t go into the clothes hamper and said, “I’m going to find something really soiled, really dirty and messed up, and I’m going to put that on.”

Talk about not growing up, by the way, sometimes we, as men, have a hard time putting our dirty clothes in the clothes hamper. I don’t know what it is, but I just have this idea that socks are made for throwing. You take your socks off and throw them. The shirt is thrown here, the pants there. My wife will say, “This is called a clothes hamper. This is where I find the dirty clothes. I wash them from here.” Sometimes I’ll say, “I’m looking for a certain shirt. Where is it?” Maybe it’s behind the bed, or somewhere like that, because I just throw it off.

So when we are wearing soiled clothes, we take them off. And that’s the imagery or picture in verse 1 where it says “laying aside.” It’s taking off the old life or the old, soiled garments of our

previous life. We need to get rid of them.

By the way, this “laying aside” is an imperative in the Greek. It’s a command; it’s not an option. And it’s in the present tense; we are to continually lay off these things.

If we are to grow, there are things we need to lay aside. Peter tells us very specifically what they are. First, he lists “all malice.” We must take these things that are condemned here and not condone them, not cover them, not make excuses for them but take them off. The word “malice” is an all-inclusive word used for “ill will” or “spite.” It is the desire to get people back for hurting us. It comes from an unforgiving spirit. I won’t forgive them. I have malice toward them. I want to pay them back. I want to be hurtful or harmful to them.

A story is told about Leonardo da Vinci when he was painting his great The Last Supper painting. He was very angry and very upset toward someone and wanted to get back at them and do something to them. So when he was painting the face of Judas Iscariot, he painted that person’s face there; he took his enemy and painted him as Judas. But then he took out another brush and was going to paint the face of Jesus, and he couldn’t do it. He was struggling; it wasn’t coming together. Then he realized that because of the unforgiveness and malice in his heart, he wasn’t able to see the face of Christ clearly. So he went back and repainted the face of Judas, and then, and only then, was he able to paint the face of Jesus Christ. What a fitting example.

Maybe you came to church today to worship God. Maybe you came to hear God’s Word, but there is malice in your heart. There is somebody you’re angry with or you’re upset with, and you want to do something to hurt them or to spite them and you’re unwilling to forgive them. The Bible says to be “kind” and “tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.” So as believers, we shouldn’t have malice. Malice will keep you from growing in your walk with Christ.

Then we are also to lay aside “all deceit” or “guile.” It’s a sin of deceitfulness. It’s crookedness. It’s dealing with people in a dishonest way. It disrupts fellowship. It’s actually the word used for a fish hook.

I’m not a fisherman. The only time I went fishing in the ocean, I didn’t know that you had to buy a license, believe it or not. I had a friend who had a boat, and he asked me if I wanted to go deep-sea fishing. I said, “Yeah, that would be cool!” So we jumped on his boat and went out fishing. We were way out near San Clemente Island. I was sitting there with my pole when the fish police pulled up. I didn’t even know they existed—the Fish and Game wardens. My friends weren’t on the boat at the time; they were snorkeling.

The wardens pulled up and asked, “Can we see your license?”

I looked at them for a minute and asked, “Driver’s license?” I thought, Why would you want my license? I’m not driving!

"No, sir. Your fishing license."

"Fishing license?!" There is all this fish in the sea, and they want me to buy a fishing license to pull them out? It's insane. Needless to say, I got a whopping ticket. And I never even caught a fish the whole trip! So I've never been back. But when you're fishing, you want to use a lure, you want to deceive the fish and hook them and you want to reel them in. That's actually what the word used here means.

Paul said in 2 Corinthians 8:21, "...providing for honorable things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men." So basically it is saying that we should live a life that is honest before others.

It was said that Abraham Lincoln was so honest that if he was representing someone as a lawyer and knew that the person was guilty, he struggled with that. He told one person, "You need to find yourself another lawyer, because I'm afraid that when I'm in the courtroom, what might be going through my head is, 'Lincoln, you're a liar. Lincoln, you're a liar.' I might just say it out loud, and that wouldn't be good."

So we need to be honest and put off deceit.

Notice the third thing we need to take off like a soiled piece of clothing: "hypocrisy." It means "pretense" or "play-acting" or "pretending to be what we are not." In the Greek, it's in the plural, which means "all expressions of phoniness." Or "not being real, not being genuine."

I heard of a Black preacher in the South who said it like this: "Be what you is and not what you ain't, because if you ain't what you is, you is what you ain't." That's good advice. There's too much hypocrisy today in the church.

Notice the fourth thing that we are to take off is "envy." Envy is a clear indication of spiritual infancy. Sadly, it happens too often in the church. The New Living Translation renders "envy" as "jealousy." So it is the idea of being envious of someone else. It's having a malicious grudge toward others who have what you want.

I heard a story about a holy man who was being tempted by demons. The demons couldn't figure out how to trip him up. They tried all different ways to trip him up, but they couldn't get to him. Then one wise, senior demon said, "I know what to do." They walked up very cautiously to this holy man and whispered in his ear, "Your brother has just been made Bishop of Alexandria." A scowl came over the man's face with great envy and jealousy.

Isn't it sad when we are angry because somebody has something we want? Someone calls you on the phone and says, "Hey, someone just gave me a brand-new BMW! It was free!"

"Praise God. I'm happy for you," you say, behind gritted teeth and with a scowl on your face. Then you say, "God, I'm mad at you right now! I'm a better Christian than him! I go to church and read my Bible! Why didn't I get a new car?!" or "Why didn't I get to marry that person?" or

“Why didn’t I get that money?” or “Why didn’t I get that job?” or “Why didn’t I have that ministry?” We get jealous. It’s sad when we get jealous or envious, and it will keep us from growing.

1 Timothy 6:6 says, “Godliness with contentment is great gain.” Be thankful for what God has given to you. In Philippians 4:11, Paul says, “I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content.”

Fifthly and lastly, we are to take off, like a soiled garment that hinders our growth, “all evil speaking.” That would be translated “slander.” Get rid of slander or “speaking against” or “talking down about someone.” It’s back-biting or getting down on others. It’s a favorite Christian pastime.

Sadly, Christian parents will do it in front of their children. Be careful, if you have children in the home, that you’re not running down other Christians or putting down pastors and ministries and slandering them. Your children are listening.

In Ephesians 4:29, Paul says, “Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.” So before we speak, we should ask ourselves, “Is it true? Is it kind? Is it necessary?” We need to “speak the truth in love,” but there are sometimes when it may not be necessary for us to say certain things.

These five, common sins of the saints will keep us from growing as believers. Back in 1 Peter 1:14-16, it says it will keep us from growing in holiness. “As obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts as in your ignorance...”—or “don’t live the way you used to”—“... but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, ‘Be holy, for I am holy.’” Then in chapter 1, verse 22, he says that we should “love one another fervently with a pure heart.” These sins will keep me from holiness, and they will keep me from love toward others and from growing as a believer.

So once and for all, take these soiled garments off.

Now here is the second step we must take, in chapter 2, verse 2. We must not only take off out of our lives what is hindering us, but we must grow in the knowledge of the Word, which will help us. We must feed on the Word of God. Verse 2 says, “As newborn babes, desire...”—there’s the key—“...the pure milk of the Word, that you may grow thereby.” That verse, flat out, tells us what we need to do to grow. So we move from what we must lay aside to what we must receive inside.

Peter is using an analogy here of a newborn baby. Let me tell you what he is not saying in this analogy. He’s not saying that you, as a baby Christian, need to desire God’s Word. He’s saying that an actual baby hungers and desires milk. So as this baby desires milk, you, as a Christian, should desire God’s Word. So as newly born ones, we should desire the Word of God. One of the most reliable indications that you are born again, that you are a true Christian, is an appetite, a hunger for, a desire to know God’s Word.

If I meet someone who says they're a Christian but they don't read their Bible, they don't want to know their Bible, they're not concerned about the Word of God, they don't study the Word of God, I have to wonder if you are truly born again. So we need to desire the Word, as a baby desires milk.

When a baby is born, it doesn't want a watch, it doesn't want an I-Phone. The minute a baby is born it doesn't say, "Where're the keys to the car?" It cries for milk; mother's milk or formula. Whatever it is, it will satisfy that child. That's how they tell you they're hungry. So we should hunger and thirst. The key here is that desire for God's Word. The word "desire" means "to crave." It speaks of an intense yearning.

It reminds me of Psalm 1. "Blessed is the man..."—or "woman"—"...who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful." Now notice that this happy, blessed psalm starts with a negative; it starts with getting away from sinful influences. "But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates..."—not "medicates"—"...day and night." Then what happens? "He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper." So we need to hunger and thirst and desire and meditate on God's Word. It means that we study, we pray, we read, we devour God's Word.

Notice in verse 2, it's the "sincere" or "pure milk of the Word." That word "sincere" or "pure" means "unmixed" or "unadulterated." The Greek word for "Word" here is "logos." It is a reference to the Scriptures. It's the Word of God.

When I got saved, that's what I noticed: that now I'm reading God's Word. I couldn't get enough of God's Word. I devoured God's Word. Peter is commanding us to feed on God's Word. So he first commands us to lay aside, and the second command is to desire God's Word, that we may grow.

Why don't more Christians feed on God's Word? Some say, "I don't have time to read the Bible." But we need to take the time. We have time to sleep, to eat, to watch TV, to text messages on our phone, for social media, but "I forgot to read my Bible." You always know that you're backsliding when you don't spend time in the Word. You've got to hear God speak through His Word. Some say, "It's not a priority." You need to make it a priority. Some say, "It's boring." But a baby desires milk, so we should delight in God's Word.

I heard one person say, "I can't find what I want when I read the Bible." You can't find what you want? What do you want? You want to order pizza? We read the Bible to know God. It's a love letter from God. If you have someone you really love and they love you and they were writing you letters, what would you think if they never opened your letters, and you never opened their letters? "I sent you all those letters, and you never opened them?!"

"No; I was too busy. I had other things to do."

The Bible is a love letter from God. He sent it to you, because He wants to reveal Himself.

I heard of a mother who found her 12-year-old daughter circling in her brand-new Bible. She asked, "Sweetheart, what are you doing?"

"I'm circling everywhere I find the word 'God,' so I can find Him when I need Him."

That's what the Bible is all about. I want to find God. I want to know God. I want to grow in my knowledge and relationship with God.

Sometimes we don't read or study the Bible the way we should, because we forget what the Bible is. The Bible is the Word of God. 1 Peter 1:23 says it is "the Word of God." It's not the word of man; it's the Word of God. Then notice in 1 Peter 1:25, it's "the Word of the Lord." So these are two common titles for the Bible: "the Word of God" and "the Word of the Lord." In 1 Peter 1:23, Peter says that it "lives." It's a living Word. It's alive and powerful and brings life to the believer. Then in verse 23, it's the eternal Word; it "abides forever." Then in verse 25, it says, "The grass withers, and its flower falls away, but the Word of the Lord endures forever."

We've had all these California poppies blooming along the freeways, but they don't last very long. When the rain goes away and the sun comes and the warmth, they wither and die. That's like man. He's like the grass; he withers and dies. But God's Word endures forever. Jesus said, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words will by no means pass away." It's the enduring Word. It's the living Word. It's the eternal Word.

2 Timothy 3:16 says, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God." That's what we call the "inspiration of Scripture." The Bible is a revelation—God reveals Himself—and the Bible is given by inspiration. It's not natural inspiration, like Shakespeare or how a musician writes a song. But the Bible was given by inspiration of God. That word "inspiration" literally means "God breathed." It's given by the very breath of God. I would define "inspiration" as God superintending human authors, using their own style and personality, so that the very words they wrote were the very words of God. I believe in what is called "verbal plenary inspiration"; "verbal" meaning "the words" and "plenary" meaning "all of them." So it's not just the ideas or concepts that are God's. And there are not some inspired parts and some non-inspired parts. Rather, "All Scripture is given by...God." It has a purpose and a design.

The Bible is not only a revelation of God and given by inspiration of God, it is also inerrant; it makes no mistakes. God never stuttered when He spoke. The Word of God is true and trustworthy. I love 2 Peter 1:20-21. Peter says, "Knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation." What does he mean by that? He's not talking about prophetic Scriptures. It's a title for all of Scripture. It's the Scripture that God spoke; that's why it's called "prophetic Scripture." So he's saying that all Scripture is not of any private interpretation, meaning that men who wrote the Bible didn't write it out of their own minds or hearts or ideas. Verse 21 says, "For prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." Those words "moved by the Holy Spirit" mean that they were "carried along."

I heard one of the new atheists recently say that the Bible was written by very smart people. It was written under human inspiration, but it's not inerrant. It's not a revelation. It's not a book from God. We can pick and choose, but there are bad things in the Bible. That's not true. The Bible is given by the breath of God, and God is a God of truth and righteousness. God would never share a lie. It's true, trustworthy and accurate.

When the men who wrote the Bible wrote it, they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. It would be a word used for the wind filling the sail of a sailboat, carrying it along. God superintended these human authors so that the words that they wrote were the very words of God. They're not their own ideas or their own thoughts; you're actually hearing God speak. So when you're reading the Bible, you're actually hearing the Word of God. You're actually hearing God speak.

We forget what the Bible can do, so we neglect our Bibles. The Bible brings us salvation. In 1 Peter 1:23, we are "born again...through the Word of God, which lives."

The Bible brings us sanctification. In John 17:17, Jesus prayed, saying, "Sanctify them by Your truth. Your Word is truth."

The Bible also equips us for service. 2 Timothy 3:17 says, "...that the man..."—or "woman"—"...of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work." So we become mature and equipped for every good service.

Now look at 1 Peter 2:2, our text, which says, "...that you may grow thereby." The Bible also brings growth. Feeding on God's Word brings spiritual growth. I've never met a mature, strong, used-of-the-Lord Christian who hasn't been a person of the Word. If you neglect God's Word, your walk with the Lord will be weakened and of no effect.

To grow as believers, here's the third thing we need to do, verse 3: remember the goodness of God. That's simple. Jesus asked, "Where are you going to go? Are you going to go away from Me? You forget the goodness of God." Why would I turn away from God when God is good? Jesus said, verse 3, "...if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious." The idea is "good." Now you have "tasted," because you have been born again by the living, enduring Word. You've grown through the Word and have "tasted." Once you drink of that stream, once you hear God's voice—once you "taste" of the goodness of the Lord, how can you ever drift away from that?

So we forget how good God is. Psalm 34:8 says, "Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good." I love Psalm 23, where David says, "The Lord is my shepherd." Then he went on to list all the ways God shepherded his life. He said that God gave him rest, refreshment, righteous paths. Even when he went through the valleys of darkness in his life, God was with him. "Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me....You anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over." Then at the end of the psalm, David said, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

When the Lord is your shepherd, you have everything you need, and you get heaven, too. He'll guide you, lead you, protect you, anoint you and bless you. Goodness and mercy will follow

you, and when you die, you get to go to heaven. All this, and heaven, too!

Since you have “tasted” the goodness of God, you should grow in your knowledge of Him through His Word. How is it that you have come to taste of the goodness of the Lord and not desire to feed on God’s Word? You go without reading the Word and you begin to be hungry. As the psalmist said, “I’ve delighted in God’s Word more than my necessary food.” The Bible is more valuable to me than silver or gold.

How can a man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to God’s Word. Your relationship to the Bible is vitally important.

So we need to do three things: we need to lay aside the sin that hinders us; we need to feed on God’s Word, which grows us; and we need to remember the goodness of God toward us.

Let’s pray.