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# IT'S TIME TO GROW UP!

1 PETER 2:1-3

*By: H.B. Charles, Jr.*



## SERMON MANUSCRIPT

A group of tourists traveled together on a sightseeing trip of a foreign land. And while visiting a picturesque village, they passed by an old man sitting beside a fence. In a rather patronizing way, one tourist asked, "Where are any great men born in this village?" The old man replied, "Nope, only babies." And it's the same way in the Church of Jesus Christ. Christians are not born again with instant or automatic spiritual maturity. We are born again as spiritual babies who must grow up to spiritual maturity. It is a lifelong process called SANCTIFICATION. Philippians 2:12-13 explains it this way, "*Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for his good pleasure.*" Indeed, it is the will of God to have the Spirit of God use the Word of God to help the children of God look like the Son of God. Unfortunately, many Christians suffer from malnutrition, arrested development, and juvenile delinquency. Consequently, many congregations are unproductive nurseries for carnal-minded babies, rather than healthy families of spiritually mature Christians. I stand to say that it is time get out of the cribs, throw away the pacifiers, and put up the toys. It's time to grow up.

Our text is the closing passage of the opening section of the 1 Peter. In 1 Peter 1-12, Peter explains the hope, security, and greatness of our salvation. In verses 13-2:3, he exhorts us to live in light of the sovereign grace of God that has saved us. This new life requires a new commitment to God, others, and self. The believer's response to God is recorded in verses 13-21. It is an extended passage with a simple point: BE HOLY. Verses 22-25 record the believer's response to other Christians: LOVE ONE ANOTHER. Then our text records the believer's response to self: GROW UP. Notice how this progression emphasizes the importance of spiritual maturity. God commands us to be holy. But holiness is not a private matter. You must learn to love your brothers and sisters in Christ if you are to live in God-honoring holiness. But you cannot practice selfless love toward others until you grow out of the spiritual immaturity that causes you to be sinfully preoccupied with yourself. Mark it down: regular attendance, active membership, generous giving, spiritual giftedness, and mystical experiences do not necessarily mean you are spiritual mature. Spiritual maturity is demonstrated in how you live before God and how you live with other Christians. 1 Peter 2:1-3 teaches two essential changes you must make in order to grow up to spiritual maturity.

## I. CHANGE YOUR CLOTHES.

Picture this scenario. You wake up early in order to exercise before you go to work or school. You put on your gear, go to the gym, and spend an hour working-out. Afterward, you are sweaty, sticky, and smelly. So you take off those filthy clothes, take a long, hot, cleansing shower, and come out feeling like a brand new person. But when you emerge from the shower, you put those same sweaty, sticky, smelly clothes on again. Of course, most of us would not do that. We know by putting on those sweat-drenched clothes again would totally nullify the cleansing bath. Yet this is exactly what many of us do when it comes to our spiritual growth. We may read the Bible daily, attend the corporate worship services regularly, and serve in ministry faithfully. But there is little evident change in our lives because the sanctifying power of God's word is nullified by the sins we refuse to acknowledge, confess, and forsake. So if you are going to grow to maturity in Christ you must change your clothes.

1 Peter 2:1 says: "*So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander.*" The term "put away" means to put away, put aside, put down, or put off. It was used to refer to taking off and laying aside old, soiled, or dirty clothing. It is used in the New Testament to call upon believers to renounce the old life of sin. For instance, Hebrews 12:1 says, "*Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.*" Christians are like athletes running a marathon. If we are going to run with endurance, we must put on the appropriate athletic attire. A woman cannot run a marathon in high-heeled pumps and a banquet gown. A man cannot run in alligator shoes and a three-piece suit. And Christians cannot be fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ if we are covered in sin and burdened by weights that keep causing us to trip, stumble, and fall. Hebrews 12:1 says lay aside "sins" and "weights." Of course, we are to lay aside all entangling sin. But we must also lay aside the weights. Weights are things that are not necessarily sinful, in and of themselves. Yet they will hinder your progress if you do not put and keep them in their proper place.

Likewise, Peter says we must "put away" the retarding sins that stunt our growth. This verb is in the AORIST TENSE, which refers to a once-and-for-all break from sin. Urgently, decisively, and completely, you need to lay aside the sins that stunt your spiritual growth. You need to change your clothes. In the BENEDICTINE monasteries of medieval Europe, the monks wore habits of simple, unimpressive cloth as a symbol of their new spiritual journey. Upon

arriving at the monastery, the novice would receive the new habit. But his old clothes were not discarded. They remained in the monastery closet as a reminder to the novice that should ever want to leave; the old clothes were waiting on him. This option forced them to choose their vocation again every day. In verse 1, Peter lists five sins we must daily lay aside in order to grow up. These five sins are placed in three categories, reflected in the repeated use of the word “all.”

#### A. TAKE OFF SPITEFUL ATTITUDES

The first sin we are told to lay aside is “malice.” The Greek word translated “malice” primarily refers to evil in general. But in this context, where Peter groups it in a list of fellow-ship-breaking sins, it carries the specific connotation of evil intentions or actions against others. It is anger, bitterness, hatred, ill-will, or unforgiveness. God says you must take it off if you are going to grow up. Is there malice in your heart? Are you carrying a grudge against anyone? Do you have bitterness in your heart against somebody? Is there someone you need to forgive? Do you need to let someone off the hook? Do not answer “no,” just because you are able to speak to that person you don’t like. Or you are able to be nice to that person who wronged you. Or you are able to be amicable, gracious, and upbeat around that person who hurt you so badly. Remember that malice is a sin of the heart. In fact, it is the sin of anger. Anger comes in different forms. Some forms of anger are explosive, violent, and destructive. But there are other forms of anger that are subtle, methodical, and controlled, so that you can be around the person you are angry with all the time without them ever detecting that ill-will toward them is boiling and simmering in your heart. 1 Corinthians 14:20 says, *“Brothers, do not be children in your thinking. Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature.”*

#### B. TAKE OFF SELFISH WAYS

The second category lists three sins: deceit, hypocrisy, and envy. These three sins refer to conduct toward others that is

motivated by a sinful fixation with self. First of all, there is “deceit,” which refers to a two-faced person who uses trickery to gain an advantage over someone – especially through his or her words. The Greek word was used of baiting a hook in order to catch a fish. The worm is placed on the hook to get the fish to bite the fishermen’s line. And through this process of deceit, the fish that is looking for dinner becomes dinner. 1 Peter 21-22, says, *“For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth.”* If you are going to follow the example of Christ, you must take off all deceitful talk that seeks to take advantage of others.

Likewise, we must take off “hypocrisy.” The word is taken from the world of the ancient Roman Theater, in which actors would don masks as they played their roles. Jesus used the term to refer to religious phonies who pretend to be something they know they are not, in order to appear righteous before others. Often, we say that a hypocrite is a person who says one thing and does another. But there’s another term for that: HUMAN. There is not one of us that is all that he would like to be or all that he could be in Christ. Every person inevitably says one thing and does another at some time. But that is not hypocrisy. Falling short of our ideals is not hypocrisy. Hypocrisy is pretending we have reached our ideals when we have not. A hypocrite is a person who deliberately pretends to be something he knows that he is not in the first place. And Jesus reserved his harshest rebukes for religious hypocrites, because you cannot grow up if you are more concerned about what people think about you than you are what God knows about you.

The third sin in this category is “envy.” We often define envy as wanting what somebody else has. But envy is much more selfish, hateful, and wicked than that. You see, wanting what someone else has is not necessarily envy. It may just be a covetous heart that wants more material things. And it happens that what you have is something that the covetous person wants. Or it may be that seeing you with a certain thing creates a desire for it in the covetous person’s heart. But that is not envy, because the person’s attitude is fixated on a thing, not you. Envy is personal. More than just wanting what another person has, envy does not want you to have it because I

do not have it! And it fills my heart with malicious intentions against you, because you have something that I do not have. Envy is littleness of the soul. Therefore, if you are going to grow up, you must take off all selfish ways, including envy.

### C. TAKE OFF SLANDEROUS CONVERSATIONS

The fifth and final sin we are told to strip away is “slander,” which translates a Greek compound that means to speak against someone or to talk another person down. It is only used twice in the Greek New Testament: here and 2 Corinthians 12:20, where the NKJV calls it “backbiting.” 1 Peter 4:3-4 says, *“For the time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry. With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you.”* What a sad indictment. When you grow to place where you refuse to do the sinful things you used to do, the unsaved people in your life will think you are strange. And they will speak evil of you. But many of us never reach that level of maturity, because our growth is stunted by slander, gossip, and criticism against one another in the church. In fact, we so good at backbiting that we have mastered the art of disguising our evil speaking as “prayer requests.” But you cannot grow up if you are busy putting other people down. And let me tell you how to stop slander in the church: Don’t listen to it.

Now, do not miss the big picture. God wants you to be holy. But you cannot be holy, if you do not love your brothers and sisters in Christ. If you are going to love right, you must grow up. But in order to grow up, you must change your clothes. So Peter commands us to take off five sins in three categories that make one point: Broken fellowship will stunt your spiritual growth. We live in a day where people believe you can have a relationship with God without having a relationship with other Christians in the church. But the Bible is clear that God measures your maturity by the quality of your

relationships with your brothers and sisters in Christ. In John 13:34-35 Jesus says, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: Just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

### II. CHANGE YOUR DIET.

Verse 1 calls us to maturity in negative terms. Verses 2-3 call us to maturity in positive terms. And the metaphor shifts here from clothing to food with this command: *“long for the pure spiritual milk.”* The term “put away” in verse 1 is a participle that modifies the command to “long for the pure spiritual milk” in verse 2. In other words, it is by laying aside these sins that we develop an appetite for the word of God. You cannot have a strong, healthy, and growing desire for God’s word if your life is clothed in the very sins that the word of God condemns. That old axiom is right: Either prayer and the Bible will keep you from sin or sin will keep you from prayer and the Bible. So if you want to know if there is unconfessed sin in your heart, all you need to do is examine your desire for God’s word. If you find it easy to go days without spending private time in God’s word, there is probably sin in your heart. If it does not bother you to be marked absent from the assembly of your local church when the word is being proclaimed, there is probably sin in your heart. If you can hear the word of God with indifference, complacency, and a stubbornness that says, “I don’t care what the Bible says...” there may be sin in your heart that you need to put away to develop an intense, intentional, and insatiable craving for God’s word.

#### A. CRAVE GOD’S WORD INTENSELY

Verse 2 says, *“long for the pure spiritual milk”* Before we examine this imperative, take a look at what this command does not say. It does not tell us to hear, read, study, meditate on, memorize, share, or obey the word. Rather than commanding us to practice a certain behavior toward the word, the text commands us to adopt a certain attitude toward the word. The world will tell you that you cannot control your feelings. But God’s word commands us to long for the word. And the verb is in the PRESENT TENSE, denoting habitual action. In other words, our desire for the word must go beyond ninety minutes on Sunday mornings. We are to crave God’s word as a way of life. Job 23:12 says, “I have not departed from the commandments of

his lips; I have treasured the words of his mouth more than my portion of food.” Psalm 19:10 says, “More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb.” Jeremiah 15:16 says, “Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words become to me a joy and the delight of my heart.”.

Not only does verse 2 command us to long for God’s word; it also describes that craving: “Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk.” The word “newborn” means born just now. The word “infants” refers to an unborn baby. The picture is that of a just born baby coming out of the mother’s womb. Peter uses this dramatic picture of a “newborn infant” to emphasize the baby’s natural, instinctive, and strong desire for milk. When children are born, they do not want a McDonald’s Happy Meal. They don’t want a Playstation, X-Box, or Game Cube. They do not want to go to Disneyland. They do not want an allowance. And they do not want to borrow the keys to the car. Newborns just want one thing: milk. If they don’t get it, they will wake up the whole house at 3 in the morning. Growing Christians are the same way. Growing Christians get cranky when they have not had their daily time in the word. They cannot sleep well at night if they have gone all day without feeding on the word. They throw a sanctified tantrum when they go to church and there is singing and shouting, but nobody feeds them the word.

#### B. CRAVE GOD’S WORD INTENTIONALLY

Verse 2b states the goal of the believer’s longing for the word: “*that by it you may grow up into salvation.*” Growing Christians do not crave the word merely to attain biblical knowledge, to show off their accumulated Bible data, or to spout out Biblical trivia. D. EDMOND HIEBERT writes, “The true aim of Bible study is never a mere mastery of its contents, but a transforming experience with the Lord who reveals himself in His word.” Growing Christians desire the word in order that they may grow up. In *Glorious Intruder*, JONI EARECKSON TADA writes of the “MYTHICAL

STANDSTILL CHRISTIAN,” which she compares to other unlikely creatures like such as goblins, mermaids, and unicorns. The “Standstill Christian, like these others make-believe beings, does not exist. “There is no such thing,” she says. “Christians are either growing in the Lord or going backward. That’s doesn’t leave much room in between. It’s like true love: it either grows or it begins to die. Love simply can’t stand still, and neither can our walk with Christ. To put it another way, the Christian’s transmission is equipped with one two gears: Drive and Reverse. There’s no such thing as Neutral – let alone Park.” You are going in the wrong direction if you do not desire the word.

Matthew 4:1-11 reports the original OPERATIONAL DESERT STORM, where Jesus was tempted by the devil in the wilderness. And the first of these three satanic attacks challenged the Lord, who had fasted 40 days, to turn stones into bread. But in Matthew 4:4, Jesus says, “*It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.’*” That statement affirms the sufficiency of Scripture. We live in a day when many Christian’s profess confidence in God’s word, while they turn to everything but God’s word for instruction in evangelism and discipleship. All too often, the Bible is laid aside as the church does its work. Instead, we depend on entertainment, marketing, sociology, psychology, therapy, extra-biblical revelations, and so-called “signs and wonders.” But the word of God is sufficient to save lost people, govern the ministry of the church, and change society. And it is sufficient to provide the spiritual guidance needed to nurture believers to spiritual maturity. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 says, “*All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.*” Mark it down: The word of God is not only the basis for spiritual birth; it’s also the basis of spiritual growth.

#### C. CRAVE GOD’S WORD INSATIABLY.

In verse 3, Peter closes this text by giving us an incentive to crave the word of God: “*If indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.*” These words are an allusion to Psalm 34:8, where David says, “*Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man who takes ref-*

*uge in him!*” David invites his readers to taste the goodness of the Lord. But Peter speaks to those who have already tasted the gracious goodness of God. It is a reference to salvation. In salvation, believers taste the goodness of the Lord. And Peter affirms that any person who has tasted the Lord’s goodness cannot and will not be satisfied with just a taste. A true taste of the Lord’s graciousness creates an insatiable appetite for it. Think about that. We cannot begin to fully understand the sovereign grace of God that saves us. Yet the God’s saving grace is just a “taste” of his goodness. If forgiving your sins, giving you new life, and providing eternal security is just of taste of God’s grace that ought to whet your appetite to crave more of what the word teaches us about our good and gracious God. Romans 2:4 inquires, “Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?” It ought not to take divine wrath to get you to repent of your sins, desire the word, and pursue spiritual maturity. You should change your diet because of how good God has been to you.

WHEN WAVES OF AFFLICTION SWEEP OVER THE SOUL  
AND SUNLIGHT IS HIDDEN FROM YOU  
WHENEVER YOU’RE TEMPTED TO FRET OR COMPLAIN  
JUST THINK OF HIS GOODNESS TO YOU

I’ll close when I tell you about a missionary named Louisa Stead. One day Louisa, her husband, and their four-year-old daughter went to enjoy a sunny day on the beach at Long Island in New York. But while they were having their picnic lunch, they suddenly heard cries for help and spotted a boy drowning in the water. Mr. Stead rushed to rescue the boy, but as often happens, the struggling and terrified child pulled his rescuer under the water with him. Both drowned as his horrified wife and daughter watched helplessly. Louisa struggled with the question why her husband, who was committed to serving Christ, should lose his life in such a tragedy, leaving her alone to care for their daughter. But she decided to trust the Lord in spite of her questions.

The Lord never answered her “why” questions. But he did heal her broken heart; send her into the missionary field, and blessed her to marry again. One day, Louisa wrote down her testimony in the form of a poem, which was later set to music. And from her tragic but triumphant testimony, the church has been blessed to sing:

TIS SO SWEET TO TRUST IN JESUS, JUST TO TAKE HIM AT HIS WORD  
JUST TO REST UPON HIS PROMISE, JUST TO KNOW, “THUS SAITH THE LORD.”

I’M SO GLAD I LEARNED TO TRUST THEE, PRECIOUS JESUS, SAVIOR, FRIEND;  
AND I KNOW THAT THOU ART WITH ME, WILT BE WITH ME TO THE END.

JESUS, JESUS, HOW I TRUST HIM! HOW I’VE PROVED HIM OVER AND OVER!  
JESUS, JESUS, PRECIOUS JESUS! O FOR GRACE TO TRUST HIM MORE!