

# How To Grow Up

1 Peter 2:1-10

Series: Tried by Fire

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There is nothing quite so appalling as to act in an immature way. We all have experiences when we act childishly -- throw a temper tantrum, or pout, or withdraw. I have a friend who describes his Christian life as "prolonged childhood, merging into premature senescence!" I sometimes feel that way. What a comfort it is, when we find ourselves acting like that, to come to the Scriptures and discover that the normal course for every Christian is to grow -- to grow to maturity in Christ. This is the promise held out to us. In the passage we will look at today, Peter counsels us in how to grow up to maturity. Let's begin with 1 Peter 2, verses 1 through 3:

**Therefore, putting aside all malice and all guile and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the word, that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, if [or, "since"] you have tasted the kindness of the Lord.**

As in the passage we dealt with in our last study, this passage begins with the conjunction "therefore" which directs us back into the preceding context. "Because something is true," Peter says, "therefore something else is true." His "therefore" introduces a logical conclusion. He goes back to verse 23 of chapter 1, where he refers to our new birth -- ". . . for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and abiding word of God." "You have been born into the family of God. Therefore," Peter says, "as a newborn babe, as one of the 'born-ones', long for the sincere milk of the Word." Peter uses the term "newborn babes" here almost in the sense that the Scots use the word "bairns" -- "born-ones." "Since you now are in the family of God - you have been born as a child into that relationship -- now as a young child, long for the milk of the Word, so that you may grow up to maturity."

It is the Word of God which causes us to grow to maturity. There is no other way to grow up. Peter's concern is that we may learn to turn to the Word and, from the Scriptures, draw the strength to grow up in every relationship, so that we no longer need to be immature but can express full manhood and womanhood in Christ.

The appetite of a young baby is legendary. Those of you who are new parents know what I am talking about. And all parents have vivid memories of two o'clock feedings -- that kitchen floor is awfully cold on your bare feet at that early hour, as you stand there, baby in arms, and wait for the bottle to warm. Then finally you can plug that bottle in the baby's mouth and silence reigns! Babies have insatiable appetites. They are going to eat, no matter what it costs them...or you! They do not care how late you have been up the night before; they do not care if you are sick -- they have to eat. When they want milk, they let you know about it. Peter says that is the way we ought to be. We ought to have that kind of desire for the Word of God, because it is the Word of God which takes us on to maturity. It is as we feed upon it that we see Christ himself, and are led to walk with him, and to abide in him, and to count on him. Every newborn Christian babe ought to have that sort of appetite.

However, just as disease in physical life can inhibit the appetite of a young child, so disease can inhibit your spiritual appetite. Occasionally a person will talk to me about his diminishing appetite for Scripture. He may say, "I don't get anything out of the Bible. It's dull. I read it, and nothing comes through." It may be that he merely needs help in learning how to study the Scriptures. That is always a possibility. There are some very simple tools you can develop which will help you to dig into the Word. Or your dryness may be the result of a satanic attack upon your life -- or merely a time of testing the Lord is taking you through, because he does want us to learn to walk by faith and not by our feelings, and there are times when there are no feelings which accompany our walk with the Lord.

But often we lose our appetite for the Word because there is sin in our life. Sin will always dull our spiritual appetites as God's children, just as disease dulls a child's physical appetite. Peter mentions in verse 1 a number of sins which can produce dullness of appetite. He says, "Put aside malice and guile and hypocrisy and envy and

slander. Then, like a newborn babe, you will long for the pure milk of the word." We must put these things away before our appetite returns.

The word translated "put aside" is an interesting term. It means "strip off" -- like a filthy garment. I was baby sitting at home last Friday when my son Joshua came home from nursery school. I sent him out in the back yard to play. I went out a bit later to check on him, and discovered that he had been playing in a mud hole for the past hour. He was covered with mud from head to foot. I had to strip off all his clothes right down to his skin out there in the back yard before I would even let him in the house. I thought of this passage as I was doing that, because this is precisely what Peter means. "Strip these things off like filthy garments. Put them away.

And we can do that, in Christ. There is sufficient power available to us in his life to enable us to turn away from these things, to say, "No!" to them, and to respond in obedience to the truth.

There is a principle in Scripture: truth is given only as we act upon truth. As we respond to the truth that we have, God gives us more. And until we do respond, we will have no more. Jesus established this principle in the very colorful metaphor in which he said that one should not "cast pearls before swine". That is, you do not take precious things and cast them before those who will tread upon them. That is God's attitude toward the Word. He does not take the precious things of his Word and cast them before people who will tread upon them and abuse them. Also, this is a provision of love, because God knows that if we continue to receive truth we do not act upon, the process desensitizes us, brutalizes us, makes us more inhumane. And so God does not give us more truth unless we are acting on the truth we already have. But when we begin to act upon the basis of the information given to us in the Word, then the Word opens up, becomes a fresh and vital book, and we begin to see truth in it which is new to us.

Now let's look in detail at the "pathogenic organisms" listed for us in verse 1. The first is "malice". Malice is a settled ill-will, a mean disposition. It is being irritable and touchy and defensive. Attempting to get close to this kind of person is just like standing next to a sheet of sandpaper -- he continually abrades you, rubs you raw. You cannot just be around him without feeling that you are going to jostle him, and he is going to react. I have a friend who describes his employer as a man with a very even disposition -- he is always mad! That is malice, ill-will. How often that appears in our homes, in the form of discourtesy, harshness, irritability. The way we talk to one another in our families, as brothers and sisters, parents and children, is often frightful! That is malice. Peter says, "Put it away. Be done with it. Strip it off, like a foul-smelling garment."

Next are "all guile and hypocrisy". Both of these have to do with phoniness. The term translated "guile" comes from Peter's fishing experience. It means "to catch with bait". It means deceit, trickiness, deceptiveness. "Hypocrisy" is another very interesting word. It comes from the Greek word, "hupokrites" -- "to speak out from under a mask", which was used in the field of Greek drama. To portray different emotions, actors would pick up the appropriate mask, depicting a smile or a frown, and speak out from under the mask. The face which was displayed would not express the true attitude of the person behind the mask. That is hypocrisy, and how often that too can be found in our homes and lives! Have you ever been irritable and snarling at your family, and then when somebody called you on the phone immediately been transformed into a gracious, loving, generous person? That is hypocrisy. "Put it away," Peter says.

"Envy" is feeling ill toward someone else's blessings -- their homes, their clothes, and their occupations, or the very fact they have a job, or whatever else God might have blessed them with. "Slander" is speaking against a brother, defaming him. Peter says we are to put away all these secret sins of the spirit. It strikes me that here Peter is not primarily concerned with the more obvious, blatant forms of sin. He does not say "Put away wife-swapping," or things of that nature. No, it is these inner, secret sins which are defiling, which blunt our taste for the Word, and inhibit our appetite. Peter says to strip them off. And when we do, then our appetite comes back. We are like the newborn babe who sincerely wants to seek out the Word and respond in obedience to it.

This is Peter's first admonition: "Put aside these things and long for the sincere, or pure, or unadulterated milk of the Word - the Word itself." It is good to read books about the Bible. They should not be ignored. But primarily

we are to read the Word itself. That is unadulterated milk. Go to that, because that is what leads you to the Lord.

"And," Peter says, "you have tasted the kindness of the Lord." The word translated "kindness" is derived from an Old Testament term which speaks of God's loyalty to his promises, his covenant-loyalty. He is true to his Word. He never deceives us, never tells us something is true unless it is true. He is loyal. Peter says, "You have tasted the loyalty of the Lord. His promises are certain and sure, and when you have acted on them, when you have laid hold of that truth, you have found that God is faithful to his Word. Now go on feasting on the Word. The result is that you will grow up to maturity. It may take time. It will be through failure. But you will grow. The promise is certain. So just keep on keeping on! Keep on responding to the Word and letting it do its work in your life."

In verses 4, 5, and 6, he picks up another very helpful metaphor. He changes from babyhood to a building process:

**And coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected by men, but choice and precious in the sight of God, you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ For this is contained in Scripture:**

**"Behold, I lay in Zion a choice stone, a precious corner stone,  
And he who believes in Him shall not be disappointed."**

He gives us three descriptions in this paragraph - one of Christ himself, one of the individual Christian, and one of the corporate body, the church. He says of Jesus that he is a living stone - "coming to him as a living stone". That is a strange symbol. We do not have any analogies for it in our experience. I have never seen a living stone. This is a combination of the animate and inanimate, and it is foreign to our experience. I have seen stones, and so for Peter to speak of Jesus as a stone is a very helpful analogy, speaking of stability, a firm position which is unmovable, unshakable. He is the bedrock of all of reality, the foundation of everything. That is Jesus - -a stone.

But he is more than that. He is a living stone. He is a dynamic, vibrant stone. He is a personable stone. You can approach him. He is warm, understanding. Stones are cold and impersonal - you will get no compassion from a stone. But Jesus is not merely a stone; he is a living stone. And therefore, Peter says, you can "keep on coming." The verb he uses here could be translated "keep on coming by yourself" -- "keep coming again and again to the One who provides stability and warmth and everything you need for life -- Jesus the living stone."

Then Peter moves on to a description of the individual believer. He, too, is a living stone, verse 5: "...you also, as living stones, [literally] being built up as a spiritual house You see, the Christian himself, in relationship to his Lord, becomes what his Lord is. We partake of his nature. We, too, become living stones, with the same characteristics -- stable, and yet warm and compassionate. I find in my own experience that the world seems to be divided into two classes of people:

there are the staunch people who can stand fast, the stable ones who sometimes tend to be very impersonal and insensitive to others; and there are the people who are sensitive and people-oriented, but who tend to be swept about, and are often not particularly stable emotionally. In this passage Peter combines both characteristics, because that is what God can produce in every life the rock like stability of a life which is founded on Jesus Christ, yet with the warmth and compassion and genuineness of a living stone.

While I was in Greece recently, I heard of a Lydian king who visited the king of Sparta because he had heard of the walls of Sparta. To his disappointment he found that Sparta had no walls. So he inquired of the king as to where these famous walls were. The king took him out to the armory, showed him his army, and said, "These are the walls of Sparta; every man among them a stone. That is the picture that Peter gives us - every one among us a stone. We have a place. We are placed on the foundation which is Jesus Christ himself, and we are growing into the same characteristics that the Lord exhibited: stability and warmth and compassion.

This symbol that Peter uses comes right out of his own experience. If you turn to chapter 16 of the book of

Matthew, beginning with verse 13, you can see something of why this symbol was so meaningful to Peter:

**Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philip pi, He began asking His disciples, saying, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" And they said, "Some say John the Baptist; some, Elijah; and others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets." [That is, "You are one of a long line of great men."] He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" And Simon Peter answered and said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."**

That is the foundational statement. That is where we begin as believers - when we are willing to say of Jesus, with Peter, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

**And Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjonas, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter [He uses a word meaning a loose, unstable chip of rock], and upon this rock [here he uses a different term meaning an immovable mass of rock, a ledge] I will build My church; and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it."**

There is the stability of the Lord's church, the building that he is erecting. The highest strategies of Hell will not overthrow it, because it is based on the foundation which is Christ himself. And anyone who is willing to say, "Lord Jesus, you are the Christ, the Son of the living God," is placed on that foundation, and begins to partake of the life of Christ himself, of the same stability which characterizes our Lord.

Then, as we go further in this paragraph in 1 Peter 2, we get a description of the body of Christ, the church, the corporate life of God's people. We are described in verse 5 as a spiritual house, and as a holy priesthood, offering up spiritual sacrifices. These are references to Israel, and go back to the Old Testament. God's people had a house then. They had the temple, and before that, the tabernacle. And they had a priesthood. Originally, all males of the nation of Israel were intended to be priests. Later God chose the tribe of Levi as the priestly tribe. And they had a divine system of worship which God had given to them. Peter says that the same thing is true of God's people now. There is a house, there is a priesthood, and there is a worship.

But he does not say, "You have a house, and you have a priesthood, and you perform a worship." He says, "You are these things. You are the house of God." The counterpart of the temple today is not the church building. The counterpart is the body of Christ - the individual believers, and any group of believers gathered together in the name of Christ. Jesus said, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in their midst." That is the church. God does not live in houses; he lives in people. Whenever the people of God gather, and wherever they gather, there a church exists. They can gather in a field, in a school, in a home. Such gatherings are the house of God.

The second thing Peter says is, "You are a priest." He does not say, "You have priests." He says, "You are priests." Every believer, everyone who knows Jesus Christ as Lord today, is a priest. A "priesthood" speaks of access to God. In the Old Testament the high priest was the only one who had the right of access into the area of the temple known as the "holy of holies", and on the day of Atonement he could enter into the presence of God. Because Jesus Christ, our high priest, has gone into the holy place, the veil guarding the holy of holies has been rent, and therefore we also have access, unmediated access, into God's presence. You do not always have to be taught the Scriptures. Teachers can be of help to you, but you can approach God yourself through the Word. You can approach God yourself through prayer. You are priests, with all the rights and privileges thereof.

Then Peter says there is a service, a ministry, involving not the sacrifice of animals but of a life. When the Levites offered up an animal, it was a picture of offering up a life, giving a life for a life. Now, as priests, we also have the privilege of offering up a life - our life. Paul says in Romans 12, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service [or, "your only logical act of worship"]." When we gather together in a meeting, or as you study the Scripture on your own, you render up worship when you respond to the truth.

That is what worship is. Worship is not an emotional sensation, some feeling that you get when you see a stained glass window or hear a beautiful choir, or when you pray. Worship is a response to revelation. It is responding in obedience to the truth. When God speaks to you through the Word, respond by saying, "Yes, I believe." And then act in obedience to that truth. You can worship in a meeting with God's people, you can worship over a sink full of dirty dishes, you can worship under your car when you are fixing the brakes. You can worship anywhere, because you are a priest, you have the right of access to God, and you can respond to the truth he reveals to you.

Peter says, then, that this is what the church is. We individually are living stones. And as we keep coming to him who is the foundation, we are built up into a house, into a priesthood, offering up acceptable sacrifices. But he tells us in the next paragraph that this is true only as faith is exercised. There is only one class of people to whom Jesus is precious - those who believe. Notice what he says in verse 7 and 8:

**This precious value, then, is for you who believe, but for those who disbelieve,  
"The stone which the builders rejected,  
This became the very corner stone,"  
and,  
"A stone of stumbling and a rock of offense";  
for they stumble because they are disobedient [or, "unpersuadable"] to the word, and to this doom they were also appointed.**

Many people have been troubled by verse 8, because it seems to indicate that their doom was appointed, that they were appointed to disbelief. But this is not what Peter is saying. He is saying that they were appointed to this penalty. Any man who is unpersuadable and rejects the truth, Peter says, will stumble as a result. It is that process which is ordained. Jesus is precious only to people who love him and believe him. But to those who do not believe him, he is not a foundation stone; he is a stone which causes stumbling and offense. He uses two words here. The first refers to a loose rock on the path that you trip over; the other refers to a ledge which stands across your way, an obstacle you cannot get through. That is what Jesus becomes to unbelievers. Everywhere such a person turns, he finds the Lord. He cannot get away from Him, He is everywhere. Just when he thinks he is free, there He is again, hounding him, running him down, standing athwart his path. He is unavoidable; we cannot get away from Him.

A number of years ago I was sitting in front of Stanford Memorial Church waiting for a person with whom I had an appointment. I noticed a young man sitting on a bench near me. He did not seem to have anything to do, so I struck up a conversation with him. He was very personable and warm and outgoing. I asked him about his life, and he told me something of his high school days and his time at Stanford. I asked him about his ambitions in life and his philosophy, and he was glad to share these with me. I asked him if he were interested in spiritual things. He said, "Yes, very much." I said, "Have you ever considered Jesus Christ?" He jumped off that bench, whirled around, turned red in the face, and became absolutely irate! I have never seen any person get so angry. He started to storm off, and I said, "Excuse me, but that's a rather extraordinary response. Can you tell me what it is that's so offensive?" He turned back and said, "My parents are Presbyterian missionaries in Taiwan. I was raised in a mission compound in China. All of my life I've been running away from Jesus Christ. And would you believe it - everywhere I go some Christian sits down and starts talking to me. I just can't believe it!" And he stormed off. As he walked off I thought, "The Lord's tracking you down. He won't let you go. There is going to be another Christian right around the next corner!"

That is what happens. God tries to the very end to bring us back. If we do not believe him, and thus make him the foundation stone, then he will track us down. We will stumble over him every time we turn around. He is the one, great, unavoidable fact of life. And Paul says that even after death our knee will still have to bow. He is unavoidable, inescapable. That is why C.S. Lewis said, "You may shut up Jesus Christ in hell with the demons. Or you may think he's a lunatic on the level with the man who thinks he's a poached egg. Or you may fall on your knees and call him God. But let's not have any of this patronizing nonsense about his being a good man!" He is simply not merely that. He is the God of eternity. He is the Sovereign Lord of the universe. And we either believe

him and make him the foundation of our life, or reject him and spend the rest of our life falling over him. There is no other alternative.

Have you ever pondered why people react so violently to Jesus? You can talk about every religious leader under the sun, with no adverse reaction. But if you talk about Jesus, people will get irate, because he is on their trail and they cannot get away from him! Why do we swear using Jesus' name? Have you ever pondered that? Why Jesus? Because, you see, he is the great, inescapable fact of life. He grates on people. They fall over him because he confronts them every place they turn. So there are only two alternatives in life. We can believe him and thus make him the foundation of our life. He then becomes the source of strength and stability which turns us into living stones in his house, and into a priesthood offering up sacrifices. Or we can become unpersuadable. Then he becomes to us that inescapable fact over which we stumble. He is an offense to us. There are no other alternatives. In verses 9 and 10 Peter says,

**But you [those of you who believe, in contrast] are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.**

Again Peter dips back into the Old Testament, as is his habit, and brings out a number of references to the nation of Israel. These are all things which were said of God's people, the Jews. They are a "chosen race." God chose them because he loved them, not because there was anything innately endearing about them. And Peter says that is true of us. God chose us not because we have any innate eligibility or beauty or worth. He chose us simply out of love. And we are a "royal priesthood." The word actually means "kingly priests," "regal priests," with all the power, dignity, and poise that image evokes. And we are a "holy nation," a separated nation, and a people for God's own possession". The last reference comes from Exodus 19, right after Israel came out of Egypt. God said, "I bore you on wings like an eagle." You know what Israel was like before that time. They were slaves - downtrodden, oppressed, intimidated -- with no sense of worth. They were not even a nation -- just a band of prisoners. God said, "I took you out of that slavery. I bore you on eagle's wings, and I made you a people."

Do you have any doubt that you are worth something? Were you raised in a family in which you were not appreciated and loved and cared for, and therefore did you grow up thinking you cannot do anything, you are nobody, you have no worth? Do you realize what Peter is saying? "You are a holy nation. You are a chosen people. You are God's own possession. You are accepted and loved and honored." That ought to give you a sense of worth. That is what you are worth in God's sight.

But this is not a call merely to privilege. All these things are true. But Peter says that you have been called in order "that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who has called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." The word translated "proclaim" means "speak forth". We are not merely to gather together to share what we have in Christ with one another. God has called us into a relationship with him in order that we might speak forth to the world the fact that we are now a people who have received mercy. We are a people not because of anything we have done, but merely because God has bestowed mercy on us.

And you know, this world - and your neighborhood, to move it closer to home -- is filled with people who do not know that they can be God's people, that they have received mercy. God has called us into his family in order for us to love him and worship him and to be a light in the world. Sometimes merely the question, "Are you interested in spiritual things?" will open people up, and you will have the opportunity to share the Good News with them? That is what God has called us to -- not to a holy huddle, but to be a holy nation -- in order that we may declare the excellencies, the inestimable value of the One who has called us as his own. We are his possession.

I see in this passage, in summary fashion, all the fundamental facts of the Christian life. How do you come into the church? Because you come from a certain religious background, or you come from the right side of the tracks, or you have the right education, or you sign the membership roll of a church organization somewhere? No, no. Peter says that it is by coming to Jesus that we are placed into the church and built up in him. And once we are in

that relationship, accepted and loved, God gives us a community to share with us all that we have in Christ. People are desperately looking for some community today, someplace where they are accepted and loved and needed. And we have it not because of what we are but because of what God is. He has called us into a community where people love us and accept us and share their life with us. Why? That we may keep it all to ourselves? No, "...that we may declare the excellencies of the One who has called us out of darkness into his marvelous light." That is our task.

Perhaps you have never asked Christ to come into your life. Jesus said, "Come unto me all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." He said, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If any one hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in." If you will open the door of your heart and ask Christ to come in, you yourself can begin to experience the kind of life that Peter is talking about.

Father, we thank you so much for the life you have called us to. We are grateful that you called us because of your mercy - not because we deserve it nor because of anything we have accomplished in life but merely because you love us and have given yourself to us. We ask that we might be a people who, with loving concern, share the life we have in you with those around us. We thank you, in Jesus' name,  
Amen.

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Catalog No.3244  
1 Peter 2:1-10  
Series: Tried by Fire  
May 5,1974  
Fourth Message  
David H. Roper  
Updated September 10, 2000.

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