



Does anyone recall the old rhyme from your childhood, “Rich man, poor man, beggar man, thief. Doctor, lawyer, merchant, chief.”? Do you remember? We used it when we were counting the petals on a daisy or the buttons on our shirt or the leftover peas on our plate. And the last one you ended up counting was the one you’d end up being: maybe rich or maybe poor, maybe a doctor or a beggar, or maybe a career in organized crime. Who knows? What in the world were you going to be when you grew up? It was an important question. And it still is.

What are you going to be? What am I going to be? I turned 60 last summer, but I think it’s still a question that’s wide open. I hope it’s wide open. What are we going to be—you and I—when and if we grow up?

This is a question the apostle Peter was asking the churches he wrote to. We’ve been looking at the NT letter of 1 Peter. Peter wrote this in Rome, but he was writing to believers scattered throughout Asia Minor, which is modern-day Turkey. Several times he calls them “exiles” because as Christ-followers they weren’t at home in this world. Their values and way of life were different, and sometimes they paid a price for that. We too as followers of Jesus are exiles because we don’t always fit in. We don’t hold the same values. We live according to the norms of another country because our citizenship is in heaven.

In chapters 1–2 Peter wants to help us understand how to **live** as exiles. He gives several commands. In 1:13 he says to set our hope on the future grace to be revealed when Jesus returns. In 1:15 he tells us to live holy lives because the One who called us is holy. And now in the passage we’re looking at today he issues two more commands. In these commands he tells us what it looks like to grow up and how to do that.

Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart. For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. For,

“All people are like grass,

and all their glory is like the flowers of the field;

the grass withers and the flowers fall,

but the word of the Lord endures forever.”

And this is the word that was preached to you.

Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good (1 Peter 1:22–2:3).

Peter gives two commands here that are closely related. In both we see growing up has to do with how we relate to one another within the household of God, what we sometimes call the church. It’s not always easy, is it? We can relate to whoever said, “To dwell above with the saints we love, that will be glory. But to dwell below with the saints we know, well that’s a different story.” We’re all so different. We come from different backgrounds, different ethnicities, different personalities. Some of us like jazz, others like country. Some of us are Patriot fans, others Falcons. Some of you are just glad football is almost over for awhile! We have different convictions about how to raise our kids, who to vote for, how to spend our money. But then we’re thrown into this thing called the family of God and expected to put all that aside and stand together in unity. Let’s face it, growing up and getting along in God’s family isn’t easy.

Fervently Love One Another from the Heart

So what does it look like to grow up? In the first command he says, “Love one another deeply from the heart.” This follows a statement that says we have “a sincere love for one another.” He’s clearly talking about relationships within the family of God. It’s not that we don’t love others, but there’s a special love we have as brothers and sisters in Christ.

It’s interesting Peter uses two different words for “love” here. When he says we have a “sincere love” for each other he uses the Greek word *phileo*, which points to what we often call “brotherly love,” the kind of love close friends or family share with one another. He says this *phileo* love you have for one another is “sincere” which means it’s real, genuine, without any hypocrisy.

But when he commands us to “love one another deeply from the heart” he uses a different Greek word—*agape*—which points to committed, sacrificial love; the kind of love God showed us when he sent Jesus to die for us.

We share *phileo* love because of what we have in common as children of God. We share *agape* love because we love each other in the face of all we don’t have in common. He says this *agape* love should be deep, which really means earnest,

something you strive towards, something you work at. Again, it's not easy. He also says it should be "from the heart"—not just on the surface, not just an act, not a smile you wipe on your face, but something deeper.

We all have people we "click" with and people we don't. There are people easy for us to love and people who aren't. Jesus once said if we just love those easy to love how are we any different from the world? But when you love those who are hard to love, who frustrate you and even insult you, then you're acting like a child of God.

We all know we live in a deeply divided nation right now. But what concerns me more is the same things dividing our country are dividing the church. It concerns me that we feel more affinity for those who share our political views than we do our brothers and sisters in Christ. It concerns me we connect more with those who join us in the social causes we deem important than we do our fellow believers who may have different opinions about those things.

The problem is we get caught up in our causes. These are things we care deeply about. It might be issues around race, or abortion, or immigration, or women's rights, or the environment, or the sex trade, or affordable housing, or healthcare for those in need. These are all important issues; things worth caring about. But what can happen is we become more cause-oriented than Christ-oriented. And we even divide from or at least resent fellow believers because they don't share our cause. Maybe they even see it differently. It happens to people; it happens to churches. A church takes on a cause, everybody gets fired up, but then the cause wanes, and they have to find another cause. That's why as a church we don't talk about these things every week. We don't let the headlines dictate our conversation here. First and foremost, we're going to be about Christ and his cause; his kingdom; his truth. And we'll stand in unity around him, despite the fact we hold different convictions about our causes. That's agape love. That's loving in a way the world can't understand but notices. That's what Peter is talking about.

Love is Part of Your Spiritual DNA

But, again, it's hard. It doesn't come naturally to us. But I want you to notice Peter also tells us how this kind of love is possible. He says two things have happened to you, both of which point to your conversion. He says you've purified your soul and you've been born again. Both of these describe from different angles what happens to us when we became a follower of Christ. Both describe our conversion.

First, from the human side you purified your soul by obeying the truth. How did you become a Christian? You obeyed the truth of the gospel by believing it. And when you did that something happened—you purified your soul. A cleansing took place that scrubbed not just the surface of your life, but your motives,

thoughts and actions. When you become a Christian you don't just raise your hand, pray a prayer, and go home to live as you always have. No! You change and you keep on changing. Peter uses a verb tense that indicates this happened in the past but it has ongoing results in our lives. This cleansing impacts the way we treat others. He says you've purified yourselves so that you have a sincere love for each other. Purification impacts how you treat others.

Second, we've been born again. This is looking at our conversion more from God's side. He gave us new life. He made us a new creation. And how did that happen? Peter says through the living and enduring word of God. He's not talking here of the Bible as we know it because the New Testament hadn't even been finished yet. I believe he's talking about the preached word, the gospel, through which we're born again. Later, at the end of verse 25, he says, "*And this is the word that was preached to you.*" That is the gospel.

He likens that gospel-word to a seed. Seeds are generally vulnerable, but not this seed. This is an imperishable seed. So when you become a Christian a seed is planted in you that's living and enduring.

That's the point of the quote Peter pulls from the book of Isaiah. Isaiah was speaking to people much like Peter's audience. He was speaking to Jews who were in exiled in Babylon, the most powerful and glorious nation on earth at the time. They felt small, insignificant and powerless compared to Babylon. Peter's readers are exiles too, feeling small, insignificant and powerless in the face of mighty Rome. But Peter says this word is more powerful and enduring than Rome or anything on earth. All the glory of Rome—its power, its intellect, its architecture—all the glory of man withers like grass and falls to the ground like the petals of a wilting flower.

Lynn and I drove through Sonoma County on Monday and it was glorious. With all the rain we've had, everything is green and beginning to bloom. But drive through Sonoma County in late August and I guarantee you all that beauty and glory will be gone; it will all be brown.

In a few hours one team will climb the victory stand after the Super Bowl and bask in the glory of being World Champions. The crowd will go wild. Awards will be given out. The trophy will be lifted, tears will be shed, huge men who haven't prayed in years will thank God. It's the glory of man and it's impressive, but it won't last. In a few years all those guys will be has-beens, their bodies and perhaps even their brains will be broken, and all their glory a faint memory they will try in vain to relive.

Maybe that sounds cynical, but that's the truth. Peter wants us to know the word of God, which has been planted in our hearts like a seed, will never fade, wither or fall. Instead, it will just

get better and better, stronger and stronger, from glory to even greater glory!

And it's because of all you can and you must love one another. Don't miss the connection between what has happened to you through the imperishable word of God planted in your heart and your ability and responsibility to love one another! My mother used to say, "You plant carrots, you get carrots." Well, you plant the imperishable word of God in a heart, and what do you get? You purify a dirty soul, and what do you get? You get love. It is like spiritual genetics. It's your spiritual DNA to love one another, so do it!

Crave Spiritual Milk

That's the first command. The second command is found in 2:2. Peter says to crave spiritual milk. Now it may sound like he's moved onto a new topic here, but he hasn't. How do I know that? Well, he starts chapter 2 with "Therefore," which means what he's about to say is connected to what he just said. It's like, "Because of what I just said, here's what I want you to do. I want you to crave spiritual milk. But before you do that you must rid yourselves of certain things."

A better translation of v. 1 goes like this, "Therefore, putting aside all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind, crave pure spiritual milk..." So in order to crave pure spiritual milk we must put aside several things. It's like stripping off an old, ragged, dirty set of clothes. And notice all those things to strip off have to do with our relationships with one another: malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy and slander. These are love-stoppers:

- **Malice:** a seething desire to bring someone down
- **Deceit:** a deliberate attempt to mislead others
- **Hypocrisy:** any attempt to appear different from what we really are
- **Envy:** longing for what others have
- **Slander:** talking down other people, especially behind their backs

Real love is different. Real love seeks and desires what's best for others. Real love tells the truth. Real love is genuine and transparent; what you see is what you get. Real love isn't jealous or envious, but rejoices in the success of others. Real love doesn't say things that destroy reputations.

I like what Frederick Buechner wrote: "What Peter charges us with is as...familiar as the sight of our own faces in the mirror. We've always known what was wrong with us: the malice in us, even at our most civilized; the way we focus on the worst in the people we know, our insincerity; our phoniness; the masks we wear that we do our real business behind; the envy, the way other people's luck stings like wasps; and all slander, all the ways

we have of putting each other down, of making such caricatures of each other that we treat each other like caricatures, even when we love each other. All that infantile nonsense and nastiness, Put it away! Peter says... Grow up to salvation! For Christ's sake, grow up."

You see, not only are these love-stoppers, they're also growth-inhibitors. You can't crave the pure spiritual milk you need to grow up if you harbor these things in your life. Like when a child gets sick and loses his appetite, when we're sick with malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy and slander we lose our appetite for what's good and we stop growing.

Notice Peter's logic here. He basically says, if you've tasted of the Lord's goodness, you should want more. When he says in v. 3, "*now that you have tasted that the Lord is good,*" he's thinking back to Psalm 34:8 where the psalmist says, "*Taste and see that the Lord is good.*" Once you do that you want more. Like a newborn baby, then, you should crave pure spiritual milk so you can grow up in your salvation. Salvation points to that day when we'll be like Jesus. So, to grow up in your salvation is to grow into Christlikeness. And to grow into Christlikeness is to grow in love.

I have a little grandson, Jake, who's still nursing. But every once in a while when we're watching him I get to give Jake a bottle. I'll tell you what, that little guy goes into high gear when he sees, smells or feels that bottle of milk! He starts moving his little hands, his mouth, his feet, reaching out for it with every part of his body. That's how hungry we should be for this milk.

But what is it? What is this pure spiritual milk we're to crave? Because Peter has been already talking about God's word, many believe that's the milk we should crave—God's word. And while that's true we should crave God's word, I'm not convinced that's what he means. I'd say he's talking all the things that nourish us in our growth: prayer, instruction in the gospel, faithful obedience, the knowledge of God, Christian fellowship and accountability, using our spiritual gifts, hearing God's word preached. All these things help us grow in our salvation.

It's very interesting, in v. 3 where he says you've "tasted that the Lord is good," the word he uses for "good" is *chrestos*. It's quite possible there's a wordplay here between *chrestos* (good) and *Christos* (Christ). The difference between "the Lord is good" and "the Lord is Christ" is one vowel! Could it be what we've tasted is the Lord Jesus Christ, and what we crave is more of Christ? Could Christ himself be the purest spiritual milk we could ever crave? In a few moments on all three of our campuses we'll celebrate communion together, and in a symbolic sense we are tasting Christ and seeking to suck in more of him into our lives so we can grow up.

I want to leave you today with three object lessons that hopefully will help you remember how God might be speaking to you.

First, I have here an old, dirty shirt to remind you to put off those love-stoppers (malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, slander). Put them off and love one another earnestly, sincerely, and from the heart.

Next, I have here some seeds to remind you that an imperishable seed has been planted in your heart—the living and enduring word of God. That seed is changing you. Through that seed you've purified your soul so you have a sincere love for your brothers and sisters in Christ. Through that seed you've been born again; you're a new creation.

Finally, I have here a baby's bottle of milk to remind you to crave that which will nourish you in your spiritual growth rather than

the things of this world which ultimately can't satisfy. Let this bottle remind you that you've tasted that the Lord, Christ is good, but there's more to be had. You haven't emptied the bottle yet; you need to keep sucking it in.

Do all that and you'll grow up. You will grow up in your salvation; you'll grow up to look like Jesus and love like Jesus.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.