

“Growing Up into Salvation”

1 Peter 2:1-3

My 11 year old daughter recently discovered old episodes of “The Andy Griffith Show” via Netflix. And with the current state of slim pickings when it comes to evening TV, so far Netflix has been a good option. I’ve watched with curiosity to see how my children would take to a TV show that was produced in a time that is so far removed from the one we live in today. Many of you feel like you grew up on the streets of Mayberry, where the greatest dilemma of the time seemed to be that nobody really wanted to admit that Aunt B’s homemade pickles were really the worst that they had ever tasted. I don’t have to convince you that today’s America is not the America that you grew up in.

The headlines in recent years have been concerning, while morality has been in a free fall. Judeo-Christian ethic is antiquated, repressive, and no longer relevant.

Major news outlets and publications have reported the decline of Christianity with giddiness. For instance:

- “Big Drop In Share of Americans Calling Themselves Christian” (New York Times, 5-12-15)
- “America’s Empty Church Problem” (The Atlantic, April 2017)
- “Even Trump Can’t Save American Christianity” (New York Times, 8-2-17)

We find ourselves living in a society where not only fewer people are confessing Jesus as Lord, but more and more people are becoming more and more hostile to Him and His exclusive claims. The church is becoming increasingly marginalized in today’s secular society.

To illustrate my point, do you remember the Chick-fil-A controversy from just a few years ago? In an interview with the Biblical Recorder, Dan Cathy was asked a question about the company's business model. He responded by saying:

"We are very much supportive of the family, the biblical definition of the family unit. We are a family-owned business, a family-led business, and we are married to our first wives. We give thanks for that. We know it might not be popular with everyone, but thank the Lord we live in a country where we can share our values and operate on biblical principles."

It wasn't long before that interview began to spread throughout various news agencies. He gave a follow up interview to the Atlanta Journal Constitution in which he was further pressed on his views. He said:

"I think we are inviting God's judgment on our nation when we shake our fist at Him and say, 'We know better than You as to what constitutes a marriage.' I pray God's mercy on our generation that has such a prideful, arrogant attitude to think that we have the audacity to define what marriage is all about."

Well, the media took that and absolutely ran with it. People chimed in on social media. To hear some talk, Chick-fil-A was some kind of hate establishment. There were protests and articles published that leaned heavily against the franchise. Even politicians began to wade in.

Rahm Emanuel, the mayor of Chicago, said, "Chick-fil-A values are not Chicago values."

Thomas Menino, the mayor of Boston, vowed to block any attempts to open a Chick-fil-A in his city.

Joe Moreno, a Chicago alderman, said that he would deny Chick-fil-A a permit if they tried to open a restaurant in his neighborhood.

Ed Lee, the mayor of San Francisco, said that he recommended that Chick-fil-A not try to come closer than a 40-mile distance from the city.

In a Mayberry world, you never would have heard of such a thing. But we don't live in Mayberry. We no longer live in a society that agrees with Judeo-Christian principle.

The skies are indeed growing dark in the West. However, the sky is not falling. Contrary to what you may have been led to believe, this is in fact a great time to be a follower of Jesus. The reason is that biblical, authentic, and genuine Christianity has always flourished when under pressure.

We will get to the text in just a minute. Before we do, let me emphasize a transition that we find here in 1 Peter. In the first chapter, Peter has largely dealt with the importance of our hope when facing the hurts of life. In the second chapter, he points out how our hope determines the way we live and operate in the midst of a corrupt culture, even in the heart of a society that is anti-Christian to the core.

He answers questions such as:

- What role should Christians play in secular culture?
- How do we respond to increasing marginalization?

Peter says that you and I are to live for Christ in the midst of a corrupt culture. We are not to retreat into our caves and crevices. Rather, we are to courageously proclaim the excellencies of Him who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light.

If you and I want to make a difference for Christ's sake in our culture, then we need to know that it all depends upon our relationship with Him. And as we look to Him in faith, we find the courage we need to live in a corrupt culture.

Much of what Peter says here in the first part of chapter two deals with growth. He says that as Christians, it is God's intention for our lives that we grow up into salvation. We are built up into a spiritual house with Christ as the cornerstone. The reason for our being grown up or built up is so that we might reflect Christ in a world that is dark.

According to Peter, growing up into salvation means that you and I be aware of at least three things:

1. The CONTEXT that fosters growth (1:22-25)

22—Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart...

I don't want to spend a whole lot of time emphasizing this since we looked at this last week, but it is important that we keep in mind the context.

Peter's instructions here in the first part of chapter two are prefaced by the command to love one another in context of the church. We have been purified for a purpose, and that purpose is 'sincere brotherly love.' He calls for unity.

The gospel puts us into a family in which God is our Father, Christ is our elder Brother, and we are brothers and sisters with one another. It is this kind of context that fosters the environment for spiritual growth that Peter goes on to describe. The truth that salvation makes us a part of the family of faith is a vital one.

Salvation is a personal experience that results in a corporate expression.

Just like a tomato plant needs a tomato cage in order for healthy growth to happen, you and I need the structure of the church. We need the fellowship of brothers and sisters who are committed to one another in love and unity. We need avenues of service in which we use our spiritual gifts for the building up of the body. We need to be equipped for ministry through the efforts of our pastors and teachers.

A vibrant, growing Christian faith is inextricably linked to the local church. It is not one that is lived out in isolation. Nor is it one that approaches the local church like a take it or leave it kind of weekly event. Instead, it recognizes that we have been formed for family, saved to serve one another, and to be in community.

Spiritual growth in the Christian life does not happen in a vacuum. It will not come apart from active involvement.

2. The CONFLICT that hinders growth (2:1)

1—So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander.

Peter says that living in a corrupt culture means that we put away all forms of corruption in our lives as believers. The very sins that he mentions here are those that negatively impact our witness to the culture. The church has been given a radically different life in Christ compared to the character of the world around it. The more unlike the world she is, the greater impact on the world she has.

In view of this, notice what Peter says we are commanded to do. He says, “So put away.” The word he uses means to lay aside; it carries the idea of taking off clothing.

Acts 7:58 - “When they had driven him out of the city, they began stoning him; and the witnesses laid aside their robes at the feet of a young man named Saul.”

He mentions some attitudes that are characteristic of the former life, attitudes that need to be cast aside. These are five barriers to the ‘brotherly love’ mentioned in chapter 1, barriers that need to be broken down and put away with.

Malice—a word that refers to evil in general; characterizes those who are entrenched in the world’s system

Deceit—speaks of being two-faced

Hypocrisy—one who plays a part in a drama; idea of wearing a mask; disingenuous

Envy—resentment toward others over an advantage that one believes he or she is deserving of; covetousness

Edward Selwyn— *“...a constant plague of all voluntary organizations, not least religious organizations, and to which even the Twelve themselves were subject at the very crisis of our Lord’s ministry.”*

Slander—speaking ill of someone else; gossip and rumor; the natural result of previous attitudes festered

Keep in mind that all of these attitudes have potentially disastrous effects on our relationships with one another. Each one of them flies in the face of Peter’s call for us to demonstrate fervent, brotherly love. The unity that he calls for demands that we take his instruction here seriously.

The idea is that evil in general, together with deceit and envy, are in no way to be tolerated in the believer's life. Likewise, spiritual pretending and a harsh critical spirit must also be done away with. These are destructive to our relationships with each other and damaging to our witness.

illus. of the church in Corinth

Peter says that certain negative attitudes and actions must be put away, but he also says that some positive steps be taken for growth's sake.

3. The CONTENT that supports growth (2:2-3)

2—Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation—

3—if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.

Negatively, there are some attitudes that we need to put away. Positively, there is an attitude that we must cultivate. In the positive sense, Peter commands us to crave the Word of God like a newborn baby craves its mother's milk.

“Pure” — *means unadulterated*

“Spiritual Milk” — *word is ‘logikon’ and refers to true logic, rational logic of God's Word*

Peter is not saying to merely read the Word, hear the Word, meditate on the Word, or memorize the Word. All of these things are essential and important. However, Peter goes deeper than activity. He presses them on the very desires and longings of the soul.

He says, “Long for the pure milk of the Word, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious.” Where there is no desire, there will be no devotion. Desiring

the 'logikon' is essential for those of us who live in a culture like ours, one that bombards us with messaging of every sort. The very ideas that are celebrated in our culture are exposed as being sinful and contrary to God's revealed will in Scripture.

Proverbs 14:12 - "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death."

There is a logic that sounds good and seems right, but it only leads to death and darkness. That's where we are today. The ideas that are at the core of our postmodern culture find their roots in the Enlightenment Period that began way back in the 18th century. This wasn't so much of an event as it was a movement among the intellectual elites. It was a time when a bunch of philosophers and thinkers across Europe started challenging the wisdom that had been the standard for generations. They introduced new ideas about politics, society, and religion.

The key idea that came out of the Enlightenment Period was that human reason and the intellect is king. It is the idea that what you observe is all there is, and that what you reason out is what is true. It ruled out the supernatural. If you can't taste it, see it, touch it, hear it, or smell it, it doesn't exist. It doesn't count when it comes to living your life practically. Reason becomes the basis for authority.

This line of thinking led to a way of life where God ceased to be the center of reality. In His place, man became the center. The famous mantra of the day was the catch phrase of 17th century philosopher Rene Descartes who said, "I think, therefore I am." In other words, my sense of what is good, true, and beautiful begins and ends with my brain, with my own logic. Reason rules out faith.

And so for the first time in 1400 years the major influencers in society began to say, “The church doesn’t get to decide what is right and wrong. We will use our brains to decide that for ourselves.” It was a massive shift, and we are seeing its rotten fruit in our crumbling culture today.

Where do you go to find true logic? Peter says you go to the Word of God. The only way for us to live and make a difference for Christ’s sake in our corrupt culture is to start by desiring the true ‘logikon,’ the pure spiritual milk of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, if indeed you have tasted God’s goodness. Keep coming back for more and more and more!

This is essential for living in a corrupt culture, and it is essential for our corporate health. When you consider Peter’s own example, for over three years he had followed Jesus up close and personal. He listened intently to the Lord’s words. He paid careful attention to the Lord’s actions. Peter himself had personally tasted the grace of God as Jesus showed him patience beyond measure and forgiveness beyond what he deserved.

Peter could look back on his life in Christ and give God the glory for his own spiritual growth. Thus, he is now able to encourage these spiritual infants much in the same way. As newborn babies, you and I must constantly crave the pure spiritual milk of God’s Word, and thereby grow up into salvation. The seed that had been planted in their hearts gave birth to new spiritual life, and maturity in Christ is now the goal.

Last week, my son came home with a little cup of dirt that he got in his Sunday School class, and in that cup a tiny tomato plant seed had been planted. Andrew was so excited. He put it in the window there in our dining room where it could

get some sunlight. As soon as he came downstairs Monday morning before school, he ran over to the window to see how his little seed was doing. When all he saw was the cup of dirt, he was a little bummed out and said, "I thought it would be growing by now!"

If you remember back to your school days, you will recall that one of the things that every school child learns in science is the growth cycle of plants. As with all living things, plants have a life cycle.

That life cycle can be broken down into at least four stages:

- Seed
- Germination
- Growth
- Reproduction

This growth cycle is an analogy in Scripture to refer to the way that believers are to grow in their faith. Our initial salvation is merely the beginning of a life of growth and maturing known as sanctification.

2 Corinthians 3:18 - "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit."

The Bible says believers are undergoing a process of transformation. The word is 'metamorphosis' which is the word we use to describe the transformation of a caterpillar into a butterfly. It is descriptive of the work of the Holy Spirit in us whereby our inner man is being progressively changed. The Spirit is freeing us

more and more from sinful traits and developing within us over time the virtues of Christlike character.

Until I go to heaven, God's Spirit will be at work in me to make me more like Jesus. (God's Word, people, circumstances, etc.)

The longer that I am in Christ, the more and more that I should look like Him. And Peter says that the content that supports and sustains this spiritual growth is the pure spiritual milk of the Word of God.

Psalm 1:1-3 - “Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on His law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.”

Lack of emphasis on sanctification explains much of the problem of so much immaturity in the body of Christ. Perhaps too many Christians in the church today are suffering from ‘arrested development’—an underdeveloped spiritual life or constant immaturity. In fact, this is merely a reflection of the greater culture of immaturity around us.

Ours is the day of perpetual adolescence. Growing old does not mean the same thing as growing up.

Christopher Noxon, New York Times - “More adults ages 18 to 49 watch the Cartoon Network than watch CNN.”

Arrested development is a problem in today's culture, and it is also a problem in today's church. Immaturity runs amuck in the body of Christ, so much so, that

spiritually mature believers who are reproducing other disciples are a very rare find. This must change if we want to reach our generation for Christ.

Jesus Christ intends for His followers to grow to maturity. How else will we ever hope to make an impact in a corrupt culture? This is the constant refrain of the New Testament:

1 Corinthians 13:11 - “When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways.”

2 Peter 3:17-18 - “You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”

Conclusion:

Living with confidence in a corrupt culture demands that believers must grow and mature in their faith. This is the will of God—our sanctification. Because a world at its worst demands a church at its best. Conformity to Jesus Christ is the goal of discipleship, and it is the work of God’s Spirit. Yet, in no way does this negate our personal responsibility. I have a role to play in my growth.

John Wesley Adams - *“Discipline is the bridge between faith and obedience.”*

We don’t pursue spiritual discipline in the Christian life in order to be accepted; we do so because in Christ we already are accepted. It is grace that motivates us. We make spiritual growth a priority through practicing spiritual discipline out of gratitude for the grace that has saved us, not as a self-advancing effort to earn acceptance.

Regardless of where you are in Christ, you are no more or no less loved by God. Those who are farther along in their spiritual growth are no more loved than those who are still in spiritual infancy. God doesn't have a special category of MVP's whom He loves like a favorite pampered child.

Unfortunately, there are a lot of mistaken ideas about what spiritual growth means. Some might be under the assumption that ministry and mission are the results of spiritual growth in my life. While that is true, it is also true that ministry and mission are the means. As I engage in serving others and sharing Christ, I grow up in Him.

Simply put, spiritual growth is all about matching up our position as believers with our practice as believers.

Two questions to ask yourself:

Have I been born again? Are you confident that Jesus has saved you from your sin? If not, trust in Him right now while you have opportunity, believing that He died for your sins and rose again from the dead.

Am I growing? If you are saved, there will be a noticeable pattern of growth in your life. Can you say with confidence that, by God's grace, you are becoming more like Christ? Maybe you are stagnant and feel stuck. The application for your life is this—like a newborn baby, long for the pure spiritual milk of the Word that by it you may grow up into salvation.

Such growth is critical for our lives in such a corrupt, broken world.