

“A Life of Growth”

HOLINESS
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October 10, 2014

Bruce: Let's open your Bibles, men, to the book of 1 Peter, continuing our examination of Holiness, as it manifests itself in our lives as redeemed children of God. Today our passage is 1 Peter chapter 2, verses 1-3. May the Lord be pleased to open our eyes, that we might behold Him more gloriously.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: Let's listen to the Scripture for a moment. “So put away all malice, and all deceit and hypocrisy, and envy, and all slander. Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.

Heavenly Father, we pray that You would open our eyes, that we might behold You more clearly, for Christ's sake. And all the Brave Men said, “Amen.”

Amen. Peter has been teaching us about the life of the saved. In other words, once you have been redeemed by the blood of the cross, what are the manifestations of your lifestyle that are radically different from the history of this world, or the system of this world? And so Peter has been telling us that our lives as believers are radically different because of what God has accomplished by applying the gospel message to our hearts. In other words, when God applies the holiness of God, the sinfulness of man, the Person of Christ, the work of Christ, and repentance and faith, when He applies that to your life, there are certain evidences.

But just as a quick review, our life in Christ is a life of hope. We've seen that. It's a life of holiness. It's a life of hallowedness, or reverence. It's also a life of harmony, as we saw last week, and sacrificial love. And today, Peter describes one more characteristic of a person whose lifestyle is in Christ, and I would call that a life of harvest, because it's a life of growth.

So here is who Peter is describing the Christian life. It's a life of hope, a life of holiness, a life of hallowedness or reverence, a life of harmony or sacrificial love, and now the fifth description that Peter gives us is a life of harvest. It's a life of growth.

Now one of the things that we need to understand, men, is this. Our Christian culture has really obliterated the concept of Christian growth. We've confused it with Christian expansion. When we talk about Christian growth, we normally talk about numbers. That has nothing to do with the Biblical concept of harvest or growth. Growth, Biblically, means depth of maturity.

Now this is one of the best passages that you'll ever find on church growth, but it has nothing to do with numbers. When you talk about expansion, that's numbers. Yes, we want more people in our churches. That would be church expansion, but it has nothing to do with church growth. Church growth is maturity. Now get that through your heads. It's not expansion in numbers, it's maturity. And this is the best passage you're going to see on the definition of church growth.

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Now let me put you in the right frame of mind, to give you the context of this by reading those verses again. “So put away all malice, and all deceit and hypocrisy, and envy, and all slander. Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, so that you may grow up. He doesn’t say “so you can expand, increase your numbers.” He says that you’ll “grow up into salvation.” You see, that is what maturity is. You’re growing up in your salvation. That’s church growth.

We understand church growth now to be church expansion. We have all these programs that bring in numbers, but we don’t have programs that teach people to grow up in their salvation. That is what Peter is going to teach us today. This is how you do it. And so that is why I call this the fifth element of our Christian life—hope, holiness, hallowedness, harmony, and now it’s harvest, because it refers to church growth.

Now, in any life, with the harvest element, you’re going to have certain features. There are certain things that hinder growth. There are certain things that encourage growth, and there are certain things that reveal growth.

Now we’re going to take a look at this passage, and we see that same outline. Here is our outline for this today.

What are the sins that hinder church growth—not expansion, but what are the sins that hinder church growth? Growth is defined as growing up into maturity and into salvation, as Peter defines it.

Secondly, what is the seed that produces growth, and thirdly, the signs that reveal growth? The sins that hinder growth, the seed that produces growth, and the signs that reveal growth.

First of all, let’s take a look at the sins that hinder growth. You see that in verse 1. He lists several of them. As with any growth process, there are always certain hindrances that prevent the harvest that must be cleared away, because they stunt or prevent growth. Here are the things that prevent growth.

Now we need to understand this in the context of the previous study that we’ve had. Previously, we talked about one of the indications, that a life in Christ is a life of harmony, which is sacrificial love. He’s talking about harmony in the body of Christ, not harmony with the world, but harmony in the body of Christ. Sacrificial love occurs in the body of Christ when we practice that on each other, and then we give it away to the world. So we need to understand that harvest is an expression of harmony. Harmony is sacrificial love. We talked about that the last couple of weeks.

So what are the sins that hinder church growth, and prevent growth? Well, in this instance, Peter says there are certain sins which must be laid aside or set aside, because they hinder our church growth—not our expansion; we’re not talking about numbers. You got that through your heads? We’re not talking about numbers; we’re talking about growing up into your salvation, and that’s the definition of church growth, growing up into your salvation. It’s maturity, not numbers.

First of all, notice the verb—rid yourself! The ESV translates it “put aside,” or “put away.” There are several different translations, but they all mean the same thing. It means rid yourself; it means lay aside; it means discard. It literally means get rid of all the stuff of your old life, and he defines it for us in verse 1.

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Now these are sins that reflect our relationship with the body of Christ. That impacts our harmony. Remember, we have hope, holiness, hallowedness, harmony, and harvest. Harvest comes right after the harmony of sacrificial love. Here are the things that interfere with sacrificial love. They prevent sacrificial love from happening. Therefore, harmony is disrupted in the body of Christ, and the world sees a church that is confused, because we're not in harmony. So we need to get rid of those things.

Peter lists several things that really affect our relationship to each other in the body of Christ. They affect our harmony with other believers. Now that's the list that you're going to see in verse 1 that affect harmony with other believers. Therefore sacrificial love is stunted, and growth does not occur, and there is very little harvest.

These sins are committed against people in the body of Christ. The idea is not that the sins committed against God are not important, but he is saying that these are the ones that hinder the harvest in the body of Christ because they are sins against each other. Our treatment of men is the evidence and result of our relationship to God. How we treat each other is a direct correlation to our relationship to God, and Peter says that you've got to get rid of some stuff. If you're going to have a harvest, you've got to get rid of the things that hinder your church growth.

So Peter uses a word to describe these sins in general terms by using the word “malice.” Notice: “put away all malice.”

That word *malice* is a very interesting word. It's a general term that's all-inclusive of many different things. I'll specifically itemize it in a moment, but generally discussing the word *malice*, it means wickedness, good-for-nothingness. It's the idea of disgracefulness.

Now malice is different from anger. Anger, Biblically, is like a brush fire. Anger is quick; it flares up just like that. It's hot, but it goes out quickly. Malice, on the other hand, is like a log burning fire. It's slow; it's increasingly hot. It's long-lasting. And he says that you've got to get rid of those things that are long-lasting issues of anger. Anger is a short burst, but malice is that long, burning flame that increases over time and is long-lasting, and has a difficult time ending. He says that you've got to get rid of all the malice among your relationships in the body of Christ.

Another way of describing that word would be “badness in quality of relationships.” It's disgracefulness that manifests itself in two major ways, and now he begins to define it.

Notice how it goes. “All malice,” and then he goes to “deceit, hypocrisy, envy and slander.” He uses four different words to express how malice is manifested in four different ways, and those four different ways can be categorized in two different categories—first of all, sins of camouflage, or what I call cover-up, and sins of comparison. Sins of camouflage, and sins of comparison. They've got to be gotten rid of, or there will be no harvest in the body of Christ.

Let's take a look at these four words. The first two deal with camouflage or cover-up—guile, deceit. The first one is the word *deceit*. It means “two-facedness.” It's the sin of cover-up and deception. You've got to get rid of all that stuff. Get rid of the cover-up that you're doing.

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The verb for the Greek tense in this word literally means “to bait, or to snare.” So really, it carries the idea of being a cover-up. Literally, it means this. It’s the intention to mislead someone, to hurt him, and give yourself an advantage. That is what deceit does. It’s the intention to mislead someone intentionally, to hurt them, and to give yourself the advantage.

Now, you see, when that is resonant in the body of Christ, in the church of Christ, there is no growth. Do you see how that works? There is going to be no harvest, because we’ve got sins of cover-up. Peter says to get rid of them. That’s the way you used to live. You don’t live like that anymore. You understand what it means to have a life of hope, a life of hallowedness, a life of harmony, a life of holiness, and now you have a life of harvest. You’ve got to get rid of those things that prevent the harvest, that prevent your church growth and your maturity. The first thing is sins of cover-up. You’ve got to get rid of those. He describes that by using the word “deceit.”

The second word is the word *hypocrisy*. That’s a sin of pretense or cover-up. It’s play acting. It’s putting on an outward show. We’ve got to get rid of those things if we’re going to have relationships, and grow in Christ.

Next is the word *envy*. It’s a sin based upon comparison. The first two are sins of cover-up, and that would be the sin of deceit, and the sin of hypocrisy—sins of camouflage. Next are the ones dealing with comparison. Envy is a sin based upon comparison.

Here is a good way of defining this word *envy*: a feeling of displeasure, because of seeing or hearing of the good fortune of others when the same good fortune has not happened to you. Let me give you that again. This is what envy is: the feeling of displeasure because you hear of the good fortune of somebody else, and you realize that you don’t have the same good fortune happening to you, and therefore you envy them. It is the sin of comparison. You’re comparing what you have compared to what they have. You’re comparing what they have to what you don’t have. It’s the sin of displeasure because of seeing or hearing about the good pleasure of somebody else, and realizing that you don’t have the same good pleasure.

Now we’ve talked about comparison before. There are only two things that comparison can do to you, and both of them are bad. Comparison will either create pride, because you say, “Well, I compare myself to someone else. I’m better than they are. I have more than they do.” That’s going to cause pride in your life. That’s not good for you.

The second thing is discouragement. They have something that I don’t have. That’s discouragement. Comparison does two things. It produces pride or discouragement in us, and neither one of those are good. Peter says to get rid of those, because they’re going to disrupt your harvest. They’re going to disrupt your growth in Christ.

So we’ve seen deceit. We’ve seen hypocrisy. We’ve seen envy. And now the fourth word he uses is *slander*, slander of every kind. It’s evil speaking, a sin produced by comparison. The apostle Paul refers to it in chapter 12, verse 20 of 2 Corinthians as “backbiting.” Slander of every kind is backbiting. It’s running somebody down in front of others because they don’t agree with or do things the way that you do. The great sin of

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envy and comparison is this: making yourself the standard. When you and I make ourselves the standard, the logical sequence is going to be this: envy and slander, because everything is based upon how I set myself up as a standard. If nobody agrees with me, I'm going to slander them. I'm going to speak ill of them, because they don't do it the way I do. You see, slander and envy are based upon the fact that I have set myself up to be the standard. And when you do that, Peter says, you've got to get rid of that. Get rid of that mindset. You are not the standard of anything, and neither am I. The Scripture is, as we'll see in a moment.

So these last two sins of comparison are produced by making ourselves the standard. Do you see the difference, why I call them camouflage and comparison? Two are covering up, and two are setting myself up as the standard.

Peter says that defamation of character is the first outward evidence of the baseness of disgracefulness. Defamation of character is one of the first evidences of malice, because it's long-lasting. It's different from anger. So this disgracefulness has manifested itself by these sins of cover-up and comparison.

Base deeds follow base thinking. First it's in the tongue, then it's in the fist.

Now these are the sins of personal character, which hurt church harmony, hinder individual church growth, and destroy the harvest of the local church. We've got to get rid of them. As long as these sins exist, there can be no harmony. And when there's no harmony, there's no church growth. There is no personal growth. Remember, church growth is defined as growing up into salvation. And Peter says, “look!” If you're going to grow up into salvation, you've got to get rid of certain things, so that the harvest will happen. There is no harvest until you get rid of stuff. You've got to get rid of the things that hinder church growth. So Peter says, (paraphrase), “Rid yourselves of them.” Discard them like dirty clothes.

Let me give you some other uses of this verb “discard,” or “get rid of,” just for your information, to see how this is used. In Romans chapter 13, verse 12, “Therefore, cast off the works of darkness.” Get rid of them. Cast them off. That's the idea of what Peter is saying. Cast off these things.

In Ephesians chapter 4, verse 22, “you have put off, concerning your former way of life.” Then, in verse 25, “Wherefore, putting away lying,” and so forth. You see, that is what Peter is saying. It's a conscientious choice to stop doing that. You've got to put those things away, because there is something bigger that is more important, and that is the harvest of Christian growth and maturity.

And I like to think of sins like these as a poison, and they must be treated as such. When somebody swallows poison, get this. Wholesome food has no benefit until the poison is first removed from the body. Now we're going to talk about some wholesome food, which is the Scripture. But, until you get rid of these things, wholesome food has no benefit, until you get rid of the poison. Peter is saying that, before you can grow, you've got to get rid of the sins! Cast them off; get rid of them. When a person swallows poison, wholesome food has no benefit, until the poison is first removed from the system. What Peter is saying is, Get rid of those things that hinder the progress of your growth. If these poisonous evils that he is describing reside in our hearts, and are not repented of,

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they will prevent the word of God from having its proper effect. They effectively neutralize it, and hinder growth.

So what is it that hinders growth? It's the sins of personal character defamation, the sins of camouflage, and the sins of cover-up. You've got to get rid of those if you're going to have any value for the Word to have its effectiveness. You've got to get rid of the poison before it makes its impact and has its influence.

The tragic consequence of disharmony in the church is the lack of growth in the local church.

Now notice what Peter is saying. Not only must there be the casting out of what is evil, but there must be the taking in of that which is good. Now go to verse 2. He says, first of all, that you've got to cast out that which is evil before you can take on that which is good. Look at verse 2. “Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation.”

Now notice what he says. First of all, if you want to have a harvest in your life, (and harvest means maturity), if you want to have maturity in your life, you've got to get rid of these things before the value of the pure spiritual milk of the Word will have its impact. You've got to get rid of the poisons before the effect of the Word has its impact upon us.

And so the first requirement for growth is to put yourself in a condition fit for growth, and that means laying aside these, and desiring the next thing, which is pure spiritual food. We need to discard the sins that hinder growth, and desire the seed that produces growth. They go together. You've got to put away the sins that hinder growth, and desire the seed that produces growth. That's in verses 1-2,

So let's take a look now at the seed that produces growth. Any questions on the sins that hinder growth—malice, deceit, envy, slander? Those are the things that hinder our individual church growth, church growth meaning harvest, to our own maturity.

So let's take a look at the seed that produces growth. Of course, we see that the seed is the Scripture, the word of God. Now notice. We were bred by the Word, in chapter 1, verse 23 of 1 Peter. “Since you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God.”

Now notice, brothers. We were bred by the Word, and now we're to be fed by the Word. Not only are you bred by the Word, but you are to be fed by the Word. That is the good seed that you are to desire. You've got to get rid of the evil before you can desire that which is good. Put yourself in apposition for church growth, and that means this. Get rid of these things, and now take on the new stuff. Discard these sins that hinder growth. Secondly, desire the things that produce growth.

Now Peter uses figurative language, and it is this. As a baby longs for nothing but its mother's pure milk, and will take nothing else, so every person in Christ should take the spiritual food that is found in the Scripture. The analogy is that, just as a baby desires his mother's pure milk, you and I as spiritual babes should desire God's pure milk from the Scripture. It's a beautiful picture. Look at a babe at it's mother's breasts. You see, we should be like that when we come to the Scripture. A baby craves the mother's pure milk. We should crave our Father's pure word.

Participant: Amen.

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Bruce: As a baby craves its mother’s pure milk, we should crave our Father’s pure word. There is our picture in verse 2.

Paul writes in 2 Corinthians chapter 4, verse 2, “Do not distort the word of God. Set forth the truth.” Don’t distort it; desire it. Teach it. True food yields a true life. There are a lot of disgraceful messages being preached today, a lot of deceitful messages. We need to desire the pure milk of the Father’s word. As a baby desires his mother’s milk, we should desire our Father’s word.

Now notice the appetite of an infant. It’s a picture we can explore for a moment. Peter says that we need to be like a child. Notice this. “Like newborn babes,” “newborn infants.” Be like a baby when it comes to growth.

What are some of the indications of a child’s growth? I talked to my wife, who is a pediatrician. She gave me a couple of insights about what a baby desires, and what are the characteristics of a hungry baby.

First of all, they should have these characteristics. First of all, it must be earnest. The desire must be in earnest. Did you ever notice that a child cries when he is impatient for his food? It isn’t an idle, sluggish desire for food; it’s a consuming desire, and they are not satisfied until they get nothing else but their mother’s pure milk. That is what we need to have with the Scripture. It’s a consuming desire. It’s an earnest desire for the Scripture.

Turn with me to Psalm 19, the words of David, which are very meaningful for us. So the first indication of us putting ourselves in a position of growth is to have an earnest desire for the right kind of food.

Go to Psalm 19, beginning at verse 7. “The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul. The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart. The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever. The rules of the LORD are true, and righteous altogether.”

Now notice. He describes the Word, in several different expressions. Now here is his summary statement. What is your and my response to that? Here is how he says it in verse 10. “More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold, sweeter also than honey, and the dripping of the honeycomb. Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.”

Now that’s the desire, the earnest desire that you and I must have. After we have discarded those things that hinder church growth, we need to put ourselves in a position to earnestly desire church growth—maturity, and that’s how I respond to the Word. Get rid of the evil things, and desire the Word of the Father. So the very first thing is that it’s an earnest desire.

Secondly, Becky said that it must be a specific desire for a baby to have the mother’s milk. Nothing replaces a child’s longing for the special natural food of the mother’s breasts. He recognizes his own mother by the taste of her own milk.

You see, it must be a specific desire. We’re not just looking for philosophy. We’re not looking for insights. We’re looking for the pure, unadulterated word of God. That’s the desire that we have.

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So it has got to be an all-consuming desire for the Scripture. It has got to be a specific desire for the Scripture. Look what Paul says in Colossians chapter 2. He says, (*paraphrase*), “Do not be deceived by the philosophies of men, but be led by the revelation of God.”

Brothers, we must be very discerning as to what we listen to. And, you see, we have to have a specific desire to listen to the Word preached, the Word studied and read, the Word meditated upon. So not only is it an earnest desire for the Scripture, but it is a specific desire for the Scripture.

Thirdly, it must be constant, using the imagery of the baby who is seeking his mother’s milk. Earnest desire, a specific desire, and it must be a constant desire.

An infant doesn’t get tired of proper food, but finds in it all that is nutritious and delicious. Nor must we tire of the word of God, nor seek for a greater variety than it offers. In other words, it has got to be constant. A baby never gets tired of it.

Do we get tired of the Scripture, of studying it, hearing it preached? What do you listen to? You see, that’s part of the imagery, like the newborn babe. It must be constant.

Participant: Bruce?

Bruce: Yes, please?

Participant: You know, with your analogy, what comes to my mind is, growing up as a pagan, I was in Young Life, and there is a conscious effort in Young Life to match up an adult with a new convert, either one of their spiritual leaders, or someone within the leadership of the organization. As you give the analogy, I keep thinking, well, where is the parent? Where is the spiritual father or mother to come alongside a new Christian? I don’t see that as much as I did when I was younger. Who do I go to for advice? Like you’re saying, who are my parents who nurture me and guide me and correct me?

Bruce: That’s a great, great point, Sig. What does the Scripture say? Older men, teach the younger men. Older women, teach the younger women. Right there is our model. Now personally, my personal preference is that we don’t have age guided Sunday school classes, in other words, ten to twelve go here, twenties to thirties go here, thirties to forties go here, forties to fifties go here, fifties and sixties go there. You need to have the seventy-year-olds with the twenty-year-olds.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: We don’t do that, because we’re concerned about appealing to the masses, and we’re not concerned about church growth. We’re not concerned about harvest, and that’s because we’ve misunderstood the idea that we need to appeal to people. Yes, we need to do that. That doesn’t give us license to be sloppy. But all I’m saying is that there is great maturity in the wisdom of the elderly, and we need to have the older men teaching the younger men. We need to have the older women teaching the younger women. There’s our model, Sig. We just don’t do that. That’s because we’ve lost the idea of church growth. We’ve lost the concept of church growth as growing up into salvation. If we took that, it would change the way we go about our Sunday school classes. Yes, please?

Participant: I always find it fascinating when we can draw a correlation between work and church, in its best form (*unclear*) to things that we’ve discovered recently. There is a fantastic book I just finished called “*Power Between Dog and Wolf*.” It’s a

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study about Wall Street traders, which are mostly young guys in their 20s, testosterone driven, and talking about the chemical reactions that occur. And not getting too far into it, what they realized was that what the trading floors needed was older men who had seen everything to act. Oddly enough, in a way, as a chemical break, for lack of a better term, a lot of the younger men hadn't seen all of these other things, and, in my mind, this is exactly what you're talking about here is exactly what science has discovered in a testosterone driven environment. We've got these twenty-year-olds who are going through brick walls, who need to learn from the seventy-year-olds who have run through the walls and suffered the consequences. There is actual evidence to prove that this works. It's fascinating that we knew that years before.

Bruce: If my memory is correct, in the Congregational church in Boston that created the first Sunday school class, the concern of the elders was that it would take away the fathers teaching at home, and so, when they voted to create Sunday school, they only passed by one vote, and that was because they were concerned about this. It would put the responsibility on the church to draw the children in, rather than the older fathers and the older mothers teaching the children themselves. That was the fear of Sunday school. And what has happened? That's exactly what Sunday school does. It's the church's responsibility to teach the children. Yes, we do have a responsibility, but where does it really lie? It lies with the older father and the older mother teaching the children in the home. Education, Biblically, occurs first of all in the home. And so, when they voted to create Sunday school, it only passed by one vote, and that was because they were concerned about this. It would move the responsibility of the church drawing the children in, rather than having the older fathers and the older mothers teaching the children themselves. That was the fear of Sunday school.

And what has happened? That's exactly what Sunday school does. The responsibility is now relegated to the church to teach the children. Yes, we do have a responsibility, but where does it really lie? It lies with the older father and the older mother teaching the children in the home. Education, biblically, is, first of all, in the home.

When I was doing my doctoral work in England, one of the men who was in my doctoral class, and my cohort, was a Jewish converted gentleman, and he was a pastor of a church, and he had a Jewish background. He had been a Reformed Jew, and an Orthodox Jew, and he did his doctoral dissertation on the education of the Jewish family at home, and he basically said this. Here was the educational system for the Jewish family in Biblical times. Education consisted of three curricular items, first of all, to worship and fear God, secondly to develop a trade, so you would never be in debt, (that's the concept of the *bar mitzvah*), and thirdly, the teaching on how to find the right mate. When was the last time we taught our kids how to date?, how to find the right mate?

And I said, “How does that translate into your life?”

He said, “I have four children. I spend one hour a day per child teaching him the Scripture, the Old Testament. My kids are four, six, eight, and ten. I spend one hour a day per child teaching them the Scripture.”

And I said, “What do you do for fun?”

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He said, “That is my fun.” (*Laughter.*) You see, my mindset was, well, you don’t have time to play racket ball or golf.

He said, “No, I don’t have time to do that, because my fun is this. It’s teaching my children the Scripture. That’s fun for me, because I realize that it’s my responsibility in the home to be the primary teacher of the Scripture to my children. You see, that’s my heritage.”

You see, it was this: teaching them to fear God and to love God, teaching them to develop a trade so they won’t be in debt when they become adults, and lastly, teaching them to find the right mate, the right man or the right woman, so they can prolong the holy race of people. Now isn’t that marvelous? I still keep in touch with him. His children are now in their 20s and 30s. Two of them are pastors, and the other two are nurses. They are all in Christian work. As nurses, they are not in Christian organizations, but they are in ministry just because of who they are as persons, because he helped them grow up into salvation. You see, he was committed to church growth, growing up in their salvation. He said, “I don’t have time to do anything else.” He spent one hour per day, per child, teaching them the Scripture.

Now I’m not saying that this is what we need to do. All I’m saying is that the concept is there. Do you understand that? That is what it means to help people to grow up in their salvation. So we need to have the older men teach the younger men, and the older women teach the younger women. Yes, please?

Participant: My son is 27, and I don’t think I did a very good job of teaching him. He went through the process. I taught him at home. He went through Catechism and church, and said all the right answers, but by the evidence of his life, and his attitude now, it didn’t stick, and I wonder if I have to start over again with him. Any advice on what you do if you didn’t do that well?

Bruce: Well, when you think of that, tell me, because I have the same situation. (*Laughter.*) I think that all we can do is love and let the Holy Spirit work, somehow. Just be careful and consistent in loving your children. The battle isn’t over, folks. You’ve got to realize that. I keep telling Becky that the battle isn’t over. We just don’t know what the Lord is going to do. I’m open to suggestions that you might have in dealing with how to do that. Ted?

Ted: Whether we raise our children in a godly fashion, or whether we’ve failed, as I feel that I’ve done, as Sig has, it’s still the Lord’s provocative Spirit that causes the person to ask the questions.

Bruce: Amen.

Ted: Then, would you say that it wasn’t just as a courtesy move, or maybe that’s a sign that God is stirring up his soul.

Bruce: Certainly.

Ted: So, again, no matter where our kids are, it all depends on God to put within them the desire to know Him.

Bruce: We need to demonstrate a radically different lifestyle, so that they will be provoked to ask the questions as to why? Yes, Bishop Rodgers?

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Bishop Rodgers: J. C. Ryle said something that most of us need to take to heart. He said, “Yes, we corrupt our children, and they take to it like ducks to water.” (*Laughter.*) In other words, you’re dealing with a sinner.

Bruce: Absolutely.

Bishop Rodgers: It’s not all on our backs.

Bruce: That’s right.

Bishop Rodgers: We can’t raise the dead.

Bruce: No, we cannot do that. That’s why we just need to be consistent in front of them. Don’t beat yourself down because of the failure of what you perceive to be the standard. Remember, we have to be careful of that. They are dealing with their own sin, and we have to help them to deal with it by being consistent in front of them. Yes, Karl?

Karl: I think it’s important that we just live the life of Christ in front of them, because the Scripture does tell us. It says, “Apollos planted, another man watered, but God gives the increase.”

Bruce: Amen.

Karl: He said that you might never see the manifestation of that harvest, but you planted the seed.

Bruce: Amen.

Karl: And that’s from where the seed comes.

Bruce: Look at our summary of what Peter is telling us. He’s telling us that, as a result of the gracious and glorious salvation found in verses 3-12 of the first chapter of 1 Peter, a wonderful prologue, he’s saying that, as a result of that, you have a different kind of lifestyle. It’s a lifestyle of hope, it’s a lifestyle of holiness, it’s a lifestyle of hallowedness or reverence, it’s a lifestyle of harmony, and it’s a lifestyle of harvest. We need to live that in front of our children, and let them see that, because it is radically different from anything else. Let’s take seriously our style of life. That’s why Peter says, “Look!” If you’re going to grow up in your salvation, you’ve got to get rid of certain things. You’ve got to get rid of all this malice. You’ve got to get rid of all this deceit, all this envy, all this comparison, all this slander. You’ve got to get rid of all those things, because if you’re going to grow, you’ve got to get rid of all of these weeds before you can deal with the seeds.

And now Peter takes us into the next thing. What are the seeds that we need to plant? That would be the Scripture itself. Just as there are signs at harvest time that growth has occurred, so there are signs of growth in the life of a believer that occur. Now what are the signs that reveal growth? We’ve talked about the sins that hinder growth, the seed that produces growth. You’ve got to get rid of the weeds before you can plant the seeds. Now what are the signs that reveal growth?

They all have to do with taste. A baby’s taste guards him against wanting other foods, because he has already experienced what provides growth.

It’s very interesting, as I talk to my wife, Becky describing all of this to me from a mother’s point of view and a doctor’s point of view about this imagery we have of infant babes. It’s a marvelous illustration that Peter uses. Peter is teaching us to recall what we have already experienced in Christ. Remember the gracious and glorious salvation the

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Lord gave us. That means that you need to go back to chapter 1, verses 3-12. Let’s go back and read that for a moment.

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. According to His great mercy, He has caused us to be born again into a living hope, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold, that perishes through it, and is tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor to the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

He says that you’ve got to remember that. Get rid of the weeds before you deal with the seeds. And now the signs that the seeds are taking growth are all a result of the understanding our gracious and glorious salvation that Peter has just described for us. He’s telling you to recall what the Lord has done in your life. Sometimes you need to go back and look at what has happened in your life to see where God is taking you in your life. You don’t look backward; you look forward to say, “This is what I’ve experienced. I’ve been reborn by the imperishable word of God. What are the indications that there is growth going on, and maturity in my life?” Peter is going to deal with those.

Now how is it that we taste the graciousness of the Lord? We do that by faith. Notice. Faith in the Scripture is described by all of our senses, and the way that we taste of the graciousness of our salvation is by faith.

First of all, sight. Faith is described by sight in Isaiah 45, verse 22. Faith is described as hearing in Isaiah chapter 55, verse 3. Faith is described by smell in Psalm chapter 45, verse 8. Faith is described by touch in Mark chapter 5, verses 30-31. And it is described by taste in Psalm 119, verse 103.

Now notice. All of those indications of faith, Biblically, have to do with our senses. So the very first sign of spiritual growth and maturity is a healthy appetite. That is the very first thing that a doctor looks for in a baby. Does it have a good appetite? One of the most dangerous symptoms of illness is what? Loss of appetite. One of the greatest indications of spiritual deadness is loss of appetite spiritually for the Word. There is no more sure indication of spiritual darkness or sickness than the lack of desire for God’s word.

Now brothers, we have to ask ourselves, do I have a healthy appetite for God’s word? Have I gotten rid of the weeds, so I can now plant the seeds?

I read of a story when I was in England of a minister who was preaching in a neighboring church in a small village in 1745. The next day, one of the resident landowners he met on the road said, “I only attend one service per Lord’s Day because I do not think I can digest more than one sermon a day.”

Reverend Walker replied, “I rather think the appetite is more the problem than the fault of digestion.” (*Laughter.*) You say, “Well, it’s too long.” You see, that speaks more of your appetite than it does your digestion. You see, the first indication of a sign of spiritual maturity and growth is a healthy appetite for the Scripture.

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The second sign is healthy food. You are what you eat. Good food affects the blood system, and blood makes healthy cells. And healthy cells make healthy bodies, and healthy bodies lead to growth. Junk food makes junk blood. Scripture teaches us that life is in the blood. The great verses of the Scripture are like the mother’s breast milk, from which we desire good food for spiritual growth.

So not only is it a healthy appetite, and healthy food, but thirdly, healthy eating. Now you can have a healthy appetite, and you can have healthy food right in front of you, but if you don’t eat it, you won’t derive the benefits from it. You can have a healthy appetite, and healthy food, but if you don’t eat the food that’s healthy, you’re not going to derive the benefits from it. Now we have a lot of opportunities to have healthy food presented to us. Do you realize the number of sermons on the Internet that are free? Go on to

<http://mljtrust.org>

Free sermons. In the car you can listen to those things.

You see, you may have a healthy appetite. You may have healthy food available. But if you don’t eat it, and you don’t digest it, it’s never going to be a benefit to you. You’ve got to take it in. There are so many resources available to us, men, that we can use, just to listen to healthy food, healthy sermons. They are available all the time on the Internet. They’re free!

Participant: That link is on our website, by the way, under Bible Resources, the one Bruce is referring to.

Bruce: Go and listen to Martyn Lloyd-Jones. They send you a note every week. “Here is a message on Ephesians.” There are 132 messages on Ephesians, or something like that. I listen to it before I go to church every Sunday. I listen to one of those sermons from somebody—Peter Masters in London, Martyn Lloyd-Jones.

When I was chairman of the board of Sola Deo Gloria, we were publishing all these great Puritan literature books that were out of print, and bringing them back into the church, because they were in the public domain and we could print them. We got a call one day from a church in Texas, and she said, “Dr. Bickel, this is Billy Rae Smith, and I’m the pastor of” such and such a church “in Delhard, Texas, and I want to know if you have any tapes by Jonathan Edwards.” *(Laughter.)*

She said, “We would like to have him come and do a weekend retreat.” *(Laughter.)*

And I said, “Well, Jonathan Edwards has been dead for 350 years.” *(Laughter.)*

“Oh, so he’s not available?” *(Laughter.)*

Then he said this. “Do you have any of his tapes?” *(Laughter.)*

Amazing, amazing! But all I’m saying is that there are great resources for us, brothers, and just because you have a healthy appetite, and just because there is healthy food in front of you, you’ve got to take it in. Take the discipline of getting rid of the weeds before you can plant the seeds.

So eat right. *(Paraphrase.)* “The words were found, and I ate them,” the Scripture says.

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Notice what Peter said in John chapter 6, verse 68, when Peter said, “To whom shall we go?” In the context of that, the Pharisees said, (*paraphrase*), “That’s awfully hard doctrine. That’s a hard piece of Scripture you’ve just taught us.” And then the disciples began to leave. The disciples left, and Jesus turns around and says, (*paraphrase*), “Are you going to leave, too?” And here is what Peter said. “To whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.”

Brothers, church growth, church maturity, church harvest is growing up in your salvation. You’ve got to get rid of the weeds before you can plant the seeds. And when the seeds are available, you’ve got to digest them. May God give us the grace to have a healthy appetite, a consistent appetite, and to digest the word of God for His glory, so that we can grow in Christ and experience church growth. May it be so, for Jesus’ sake.

Let us pray. Father, we thank You for the clarity of Your word, this wonderful picture of an infant baby desiring his mother’s milk. And, like infant babes, we are to desire the pure milk of the Word. And may it be so, for Jesus’ sake, that we will have a healthy appetite, we’ll have a healthy description of the food before us, and that we will digest it for Your glory. And may it be so, for Jesus’ sake. And all the Brave Men said, “Amen.”