

# Growing Up with Respect to Salvation

## 1 Peter 2:1-25 — Understanding I and II Peter Series, Part 4

*By Escape the Mustard Tree*

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### Introduction

Last time we watched Peter finish his first chapter on the word that doesn't fade: "Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you" (1 Pet. 1:25). His very next word is "Therefore." The chapter break makes it easy to miss, but Peter has not changed the subject. The same word that gave them new birth (1 Pet. 1:23) is the word they're now to feed on.

He'd also just told them where to look. God raised Jesus from the dead and "gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God" (1 Pet. 1:21). The God who raised and glorified His Son is the One they're trusting to do the same for them. Their inheritance is ahead of them, and they are kept for it "through faith" (1 Pet. 1:5), a faith that has to be lived out day by day.

So Peter turns to what that looks like, and he gives it to them in a series of pictures: newborn babies, living stones, pilgrims far from home, servants who chose to stay, and finally Jesus Himself, walking ahead and leaving footprints. Every one of them says the same thing. Growing toward this salvation is not automatic, and it is not passive.

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### I. Lay It Aside, and Desire the Milk

"Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious." (1 Pet. 2:1-3)

Before Peter tells them what to take in, he tells them what to put down. Look at the list:

- **Malice** is plain ill will, wanting harm for someone.
- **Deceit** is a word for a trick, the kind of bait that lures a fish.
- **Hypocrisy** is the actor's word, playing a part on a stage.
- **Envy** is resentment at someone else's good.
- **Evil speaking** is talking someone down, the backbiting that happens when they aren't in the room.

Every one of those is something a Christian can carry, and Peter tells them to lay it aside the way you'd take off a garment. If one of them is yours, put it down. Nothing on that list is worth keeping if it costs you any part of what's waiting ahead.

Then: "as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word." A newborn doesn't have to be talked into wanting milk. It cries for it. That's the kind of hunger Peter means.

And why? "That you may grow thereby." Grow toward what? Many of the oldest Greek manuscripts answer it outright, adding "into salvation" after "grow," and that's why some

translations read "grow in respect to salvation." The NKJV follows the manuscripts that do not have those words. Either way, Peter has already named the goal: "the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls" (1 Pet. 1:9). The new birth is behind them (1 Pet. 1:23), so it is not something they grow into. The salvation of the soul is.

Peter is not the only one who says it this way. Paul told the Philippians, "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure" (Phil. 2:12-13). James also wrote to readers "scattered abroad" (Jas. 1:1), and his words are nearly Peter's own: "lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls" (Jas. 1:21). Three writers, the same order: lay aside, take in the word, and the soul is what's at stake.

"If indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious" echoes the psalm: "Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good" (Ps. 34:8). They've had a taste. That's what makes them hungry for more.

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## II. From Milk to Solid Food

Milk is where growth starts. It is not where it's supposed to end, and Scripture uses this same picture twice more, both times as a rebuke.

Paul told the Corinthians, "I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it" (1 Cor. 3:1-2). And look at what he goes on to explain to them in that same chapter: the day when "the fire will test each one's work," when one man "will receive a reward" and another "will suffer loss" (1 Cor. 3:13-15). That is the solid food they were not ready for.

Hebrews says the same thing. The writer wants to teach about Christ as High Priest "according to the order of Melchizedek," the king who was also a priest, but he says it's "hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing." Then: "though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food... But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil" (Heb. 5:10-14).

In both places, the solid food is teaching about the coming age: rewards and loss at the judgment seat, and Christ reigning as King-Priest. That's where Peter's babies are meant to end up. They start with milk, but they're supposed to grow until they can take in the things of the coming kingdom.

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## III. Living Stones, a Royal Priesthood

"Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." (1 Pet. 2:4-5)

Peter changes pictures, from a nursery to a building site, and anyone who knew Jerusalem would know what building he had in mind. Israel had a temple made of cut stone, the house where God was worshiped. Peter says there's another house going up. Jesus is the cornerstone, and the stones

are living ones, the Christians themselves, being fitted together into "a spiritual house" with a priesthood serving in it.

Then he lays out what Scripture says about that cornerstone, and it divides people two ways:

"Behold, I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone, elect, precious, and he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame. Therefore, to you who believe, He is precious; but to those who are disobedient, 'The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone,' and 'A stone of stumbling and a rock of offense.' They stumble, being disobedient to the word." (1 Pet. 2:6-8)

"The builders" were Israel's leaders. Jesus had quoted that very line (Ps. 118:22) to their faces in the temple courts, and then told them, "the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it" (Matt. 21:42-43). Listen to what Peter calls his readers next:

"But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy." (1 Pet. 2:9-10)

Those titles were first spoken at Sinai, to Israel: "if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people... And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exod. 19:5-6). Notice the *if*. Israel as a nation stumbled over the very Cornerstone that promise pointed to, and now the "holy nation" Peter describes is being built out of the Christians he's writing to.

That doesn't mean God is finished with Israel. Paul asks it directly: "have they stumbled that they should fall? Certainly not!" (Rom. 11:11). "God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew" (Rom. 11:2). Israel's blindness is "in part," and it lasts "until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in" (Rom. 11:25). She has been set aside for a time, and in that time a nation is being raised up that will bear the fruit.

And look at the word Peter puts in front of "priesthood": *royal*. These are priests who will also reign, and the promise of a throne was made to an assembly in Asia itself: "To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne" (Rev. 3:21). That's the King-Priest Hebrews wanted to teach about, Christ after the order of Melchizedek, and the living stones are being built for a share in His reign.

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## IV. Sojourners and Pilgrims

"Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation." (1 Pet. 2:11-12)

A sojourner is someone living in a place that isn't his home. A pilgrim is passing through on the way somewhere else. Peter's readers were living in Pontus and Galatia and Asia, but their inheritance was "reserved in heaven" (1 Pet. 1:4), and they were to live like people on the way to it.

And notice the two pressures in these two verses. From inside: "fleshly lusts which war against the soul." From outside: neighbors who "speak against you as evildoers." Peter addresses both. The war inside is fought over the soul, the same soul whose salvation is the goal of their faith (1 Pet. 1:9) and which they've been purifying by obeying the truth (1 Pet. 1:22). The answer to the slander outside is simply good conduct, lived where people can see it, so that even the accusers end up glorifying God "in the day of visitation."

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## V. Free, and Bondservants of God

"Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men—as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God. Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king." (1 Pet. 2:13-17)

"Honor the king." History tells us who sat on that throne when Peter wrote: Nero, the emperor whose persecution was about to fall on Christians. Peter tells them to honor him anyway, and to silence their critics by doing good.

Then he describes them with two words that don't seem to belong together: "free" and "bondservants." The law of Moses gives a picture of exactly that pair. A Hebrew servant served six years, "and in the seventh he shall go out free and pay nothing." But if the servant said, "I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free," his master brought him to the doorpost and pierced his ear, "and he shall serve him forever" (Exod. 21:2, 5-6). He was free to go. He chose to stay, out of love, and the choice was for life.

That's the kind of servant Peter is describing. They're free. Their liberty is real, and Peter does not tell them to give it up. He tells them not to use it "as a cloak for vice," but to spend it serving God.

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## VI. Following in His Steps

"Servants, be submissive to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh. For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully. For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps." (1 Pet. 2:18-21)

Peter's first readers included household servants, some with harsh masters. Most of us aren't servants in that sense, but the principle carries straight over to anyone who works under someone hard to work for. Suffering for your own faults earns nothing. Suffering for doing right, and taking it patiently, is "commendable before God." It is what they were called to.

Then Peter shows them the steps they're following:

"Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth; who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who

judges righteously; who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed." (1 Pet. 2:22-24)

Jesus did not answer insult with insult or threaten the men who hurt Him. He "committed Himself to Him who judges righteously." That's the same Judge Peter named in the first chapter, the Father "who without partiality judges according to each one's work" (1 Pet. 1:17). Jesus left the outcome with Him, and Peter tells them to do the same.

There's a reason it's worth it. Suffering comes first, and glory follows it. Peter said so about Christ in the first chapter, "the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow" (1 Pet. 1:11), and he says it of his readers later in the letter: "rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy" (1 Pet. 4:13). Paul puts the same condition on it: "joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together" (Rom. 8:17).

Then Peter closes the chapter: "For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls" (1 Pet. 2:25). *Returned*. It's the same word Jesus used to Peter on the night of his denials: "when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren" (Luke 22:32). Peter knew what it was to stray and be brought back. Now, as the man told to feed the Lord's sheep, he writes to sheep who've been brought back too, and he points them to the Shepherd of their *souls*.

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## Applying "Growing Up with Respect to Salvation"

Peter never describes growth in the abstract. It happens in ordinary places: what you put down and what you're hungry for, whether you settle for milk or press on to solid food, how you handle the pull of the flesh and the slander of neighbors, how you treat the authority over you, and what you do when you are treated unfairly for doing right.

None of it earns the new birth; that's settled and behind them. All of it is how a soul grows toward the salvation still ahead. And in every picture Peter uses, the One they're following has already walked the road. He suffered first, He was glorified after, and He left His steps for them to follow.

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## Looking Ahead

Next, Peter carries these same principles into the closest relationships there are, wives and husbands, and he describes them as "heirs together of the grace of life" (1 Pet. 3:7).

*Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version.*