Wherefore laying aside all malice

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[0:00] 1 Peter chapter 2, where for laying aside all malice and all guile and hypocrisy and evil and envy and all evil speaking, as newborn babes desire the sincere milk of the word that ye may grow thereby, if so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious.

Now the 1 Epistle of Peter gives us a nonqually wide field for discovering laying bare principles which are directed at stimulating and strengthening the Christian believer.
So that his Christian character may be more finished, more followed and that his witness to his fellow men may be more thorough going.
In chapter 1 alone, Peter has been stirring up the Christian community within itself to better hope and better holiness of practical life, to better fear, that is to say reverence and respect for God the Father and his claims, and better brotherly love.
Just as later on as the Epistle unfolds, he urges the Christian believer to be a golden, blameless giver of testimony out and about and in daily contact with the non-Christian world.
[1:44] Now of course what Peter is calling on his readers to do represents a very tall order indeed.

And a person can quite easily become utterly depressed by his or her own weakness, his or her own proneness to do the very opposite of what is required.
He is depressed almost to the point of deciding that achievements of that quality are alright perhaps for the favoured few women Christians, for the Elijahs and the Pauls, the super-Christians, but not for them.
Something more secluded, something more sedent, something less ambitious, something less outgoing, less adventuresome, will regrettably have to be settled for.
Now of course Peter is very deeply aware of the temptations of that kind. He knew them very closely in the crucible of his own personal experience.
[3:16] He knew them closely in his having succumbed to them, in having made a thorough mess, that's all we can say, of his Christian loyalties and his Christian witness at a very critical juncture.

But now he has got the very doctrine to bring encouragement to every single disciple of Christ.
However wavering his efforts may be at becoming a Christian, however wavering his efforts up till now.
And the doctrine that he has got hold of, and the doctrine that he is propounding, and the doctrine that he is rejoicing in, is the doctrine of growth unto salvation. Some remarkably decent manuscripts are these two words at verse 2, unto salvation, growth unto salvation.
Now let's look at some of the main points that Peter brings forward in these verses. First of all is just this idea of growing unto salvation. Rome wasn't built in a day.
[4:28] Rome was built in a day. Neither does a Christian believer become mature in character, nor effective in Christian witness in a day.

There's growth involved. There's a maturing process involved. More or less drawn out from one individual to another.
Grow unto salvation, he exhorts his readers. And that means, of course, that they haven't yet reached the measure, what Paul calls the measure of the stature, of the fullness of Christ.
He's asking them to become holy in all manner of conduct, that is to say, dedicated to Christ and Christ-like.
Whereas the believers say, holiness is too often marred by numerous defilements of the flesh and of the spirit. Again, he's been talking about Christian hope, and the Christian hope is often shaky.
[5:43] It is often uncertain and reliable, even as Christ and his power and promises remain his single object of spiritual confidence.

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What about fear and respect and reverence for God? Well, sadly that's too often conspicuous by its absence in the life of a believer.
It may be sometimes replaced by a frivolous spirit. It's so easy to pass from being light-hearted, which is a perfectly legitimate mood to have at the right time.
So easy to pass from that into frivolity, which is never legitimate for a Christian. Or again, the Christian may display worldly callousness, insensitiveness to Christian reality.
Yes, the man of God. His attitude fundamentally, he may be outwardly displaying all the appearances of him, and yet at heart there's an insensitiveness.
[6:56] Or again, he may be given to a worldly dissipation of precious Christian time instead of redeeming the time.

And what about brotherly love? Well, every Christian experiences brotherly love, and every Christian at some point or other, more or less frequently, more or less regularly, displays brotherly love.
But surely the Christian has got to admit that brotherly love seldom continues steadfast. Too frequently there is impatience with other people, an impatience that they can see.
Too frequently there is disregard of other Christians, their feelings, a disregard of their circumstances of need, their proper claims. There are claims.
There are times when more often than not in the life of the Christian, these are the noticeable things, instead of brotherly love. And yet, what Peter is saying is this, that if there is the basic Christian experience there at all, then at least the germ of all these desirable graces and achievements is undoubtedly present too.
[8:13] Never mind. Never mind. Never mind. Shameful though they be. Very carrying failures. Very carrying weaknesses and deficiencies. If the basic Christian experience of having tasted that the Lord is gracious is there at all, and then the believer is on a path, say, which however tortuous for him its direction from time to time may be, leads upwards and leads onwards to the perfect day.

Well, if we keep Peter's own metaphor, every newborn child in God's family is a love. Every newborn child in God's family possesses all the faculties in baby form, if you like, a child, which will one day adorn to perfection the victorious and the glorified saint.
And the proof of this lies in the very factor of growth. Of course, if you think of growth without any metaphors, growth I mean in saying a child, growth may be hindered by a whole lot of things.
It may be hindered by disease. It may be hindered by certain unhelpful external circumstances to which the child is exposed. It may be hindered by pools feeding, by a wrong kind of dive.
And yet the tendency to growth is there. Well, it's the same with the imperfect Christian. Now, who is the imperfect Christian?
[9:55] Is he some spiritually scruffy person that we can all identify? Who is the imperfect Christian? The truth is that so long as any believer whatsoever is in this world, his childhood in a very real sense stays with him.

And his need of development corresponds exactly. Even Paul the aged. Paul who had reached the stage of being ready to be offered.
And he could say with integrity that he had fought the good fight, that he had finished his course. He admitted with real humility, I don't count myself to have apprehended.
But this one thing I do, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. In other words, he wasn't paralyzed by his past weaknesses.
He wasn't paralyzed. It's so easy to be paralyzed by our weaknesses. Your weaknesses stay you in the face and you become paralyzed. Paul had weaknesses. He confessed them. He wasn't paralyzed by past weakness and failure.
[11:08] He wasn't paralyzed by his deficiencies. Rather, he was spurred on by them to new and hopeful efforts. Now this is what Peter is talking about with respect to all Christians, growth and to salvation.

Not just justification, that it's already possessed. In the case of everyone who has committed his case to Jesus, he's already got it. Not just the earnest of the spirit, he's got that.
Not just the hope of glory, he's got that. Peter is talking about the noticeable, the conspicuous approach to glory itself.
The full experience of divine sanctification, of divine power that carries the Christian onwards to complete, to ultimate victory.

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So the first great comforting thought here that the apostle gives to people who are very inadequate and very far short of what they ought to be as Christians, full of sins and failures, miserable failures, the first element of comfort lies in the conception of growth and to salvation.
[12:18] Now he says that this growth must be promoted. And he says that the instrument of growth, very specifically, is the sincere milk of the word.

Growth must be promoted by use of the sincere milk of the word. Now you can see at once that this, among other things, is true, that there's no place here for some lazy expectation on the part of the Christian that time will work wonders.
My life is a bit of a mess and I'm pretty poor in this direction and that direction. But time will work wonders and God's spirit will see to it without reference to cooperative enterprise on his part, that things will work wonders and that things will work wonders.
That's not what Peter is saying. No, he's saying that the sincere milk of the word must be employed so that the Christian will carry on within the process of growth.
The sincere milk of the word. Now there doesn't seem to be any reason to doubt that he's referring to the word of the gospel referred to in the previous chapter, verses 22 to 5.
[13:41] The living and abiding word of God, the word of God that represents the principle of regeneration, the new birth, and which keeps on supporting, keeps on nourishing the development of the new life in all true believers.

And Peter is saying, surely, that it's by the continual use of the word, the written word of God, that Christians mature and in no other way.
Now we know that in 1 Corinthians chapter 3 and in Hebrews chapter 5, milk is distinguished from strong meat in the context of Christian instruction.
And in these places, the word milk refers to the elementary things, the ABC of Christian doctrine.
And remember in Hebrews, the writer says that the Christians, he knows, shouldn't have been at that most elementary stage.
They should have advanced, they should have progressed out of the primary class and they should be well on their way to the top class. They should, in fact, be safe, if things were only right, by now become teachers. But here, there is no such thought, so far as I can see in Peter's mind, when the word is described as milk.
[15:11] I think it's just here synonymous for wholesome nourishment. All real Christians in this world are addressed as newborn babies.

And the word of the gospel is the nourishing agent, the nourishing instrument which meets the need of that stage and every other stage because the Christian never outgrows his need of the milk of the word.
He receives it through private reading. He receives it through private reading. He receives it through Bible study in a fellowship of a group of Christians or he receives it through the public teaching ministries of the church.
But he can never outgrow the need of the nourishment of the word. It's the sincere milk of the word.
Well, you tell me what the sincere milk of the word means if we just use that English expression.
What does it mean? What does it convey to you? What does it suggest to you, the sincere milk of the word? What does it mean? What does it mean to you? It's the original source of the word. It is hardly the best English word of today to translate the Greek term that Peter is using in the original.
[16:32] There are two ideas here. The milk that is reasonable in the same sense as you find the word used in Romans chapter 12.

The milk that is reasonable service. The milk that is rational perhaps we could say. Perhaps if we don't mean rationalistic. And the guileless milk of the word.
It's reasonable milk in this sense that it's used in the service of the spirit, the living spirit of the Christian, as against the mere carnal, material rites and ceremonies of the Lord.
So the reasonable milk is the food which by its proper nature is adapted to the higher spiritual life of man.
We can say that in the word of God, there are all the ingredients for fulfilling, for developing, for satisfying every single faculty and principle of the regenerate nature, the newborn spiritual person.
[17:44] Nothing else can do it. No other form of knowledge can save, no other form of knowledge can mature the spiritual life of man.

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And then it's sincere milk or perhaps remembering the context, we might just say the guileless milk of the word.
That's an aspect that mustn't be lost sight of. But if we take that meaning, we ask why does Peter introduce that description at all here?
And probably it's in contrast to the expression guile in verse 9, where he exhorts Christians to lay aside all guile. And all in all, Peter is probably saying that it is the unadapted and mixed wide of God which alone can promote mature Christianity.
Now when we have children growing up, we, in the most convincing fashion, produce the milk bottle, it's on the table and we tell them to drink it and we use all sorts of languages, it's good for you, there's nothing like it, this will make you a big girl, this will make you a big boy.
[19:00] And I think that what Peter is doing is saying the word of God must be treated in precisely that way. The unadapted is unmixed word of God.

That means that all human adhesion, such as false teachers in Peter's time or false teachers in our own time, might impose upon the word of God, corrupting the truth, interfering with the usefulness of the truth as an instrument either of conversion or sanctification.
All these must be eliminated. And I think we don't even require to be thinking of such extreme situations as with the influence that heretics may have on our generation.
Even imposing true doctrines on the wrong text is excluded. The importance is stressed, at least in principle, of discovering what each scripture without adulteration says.
Starting against the insertion of ideas, even good ideas, ideas good in themselves that don't strictly belong, the unadapted word which is able to build us up.
[20:27] Desire the reasonable milk, the milk that suits the higher spiritual nature of man, the unadapted milk of the word, that you may grow up to salvation.

It is desired. Buy up every opportunity for improving your acquaintance with the word, for improving your understanding of the word.
And not just intellectual understanding, not just a matter of corrected exegesis, but approach it in a spiritual way as it provides spiritual nourishment.
Now finally, let's think of the conditions for the proper use of the pure and reasonable milk of the word.
As newborn babes desire the sincere milk of the word. The apostle is taking the position that his readers have the new life of regeneration through the word in personal possession.
[21:43] And there's no desire for growth. There's no actual Christian growth and there's no desire for growth without regeneration, without new birth.

There can be in fact a great flurry of Bible reading. There can be much ruffling and shuffling of pages, much listening to the gospel.
With very little pleasure or profit from either one of these. And the thing which conditions more than anything else our attitude to the word of God is whether or not we are born again by that same word.
But what he said is that given a new birth, granted a new birth, granted this new radical attitude towards God, towards Christ, towards the gospel, which flows from the new birth, there will be at least a germinal interest in the whole word of God.
There will be at least a germinal interest in the value of the word of God. as the divinely appointed means of promoting Christian spiritual growth.
[23:03] But more than just the basic experience of spiritual life, if needed, if we are to enjoy, if we are to gain by the word of God.

Desire the sincere milk of the word. And I was not saying, look, I hope, my friends, that you will have many spasms of desire for the gospel. That you will be the kind of people who will be suddenly overtaken by a spasm of eagerness for the word of God in your rest of your bookcase, and get out the Bible and sit down.
Surely that's not the kind of thing that he means. It's not the kind of thing that would be in conformity with the teaching of scripture elsewhere, which, for example, says in the book of Psalms that, well, seven times a day, and it speaks of regularity, a regular discipline process.
It is my desire to seek thee. It is my desire to study out thy word. So the Christian must adopt a disciplined and careful attitude of concern for his own spiritual health.

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Now, no person of ordinary health, I mean in natural life, no person of ordinary health will go through the day without thinking about food.
[24:22] His physical need of food will force the subject on his attention. I'm feeling peckish, a man will say, and you don't need to ask what he means by it. He suddenly realizes that his body requires food.

But of course in practice, we take reasonable steps to promote the support of our natural life. We don't say to our wives, look, I'll come in as soon as I'm feeling peckish.
We have a regime of good cooking, we have a regime of regular meals. Nobody thinks it's odd, nobody thinks it's strange to talk about coming in or going out for dinner.
Well, maybe men folk who live on their own, they often have the sympathy of people who live in families and they'll say, Poor chap, I don't think he's looking after himself. He's got no regular meals, nothing but the fine path.
Well, of course there are other men who don't need any sympathy that could take their place alongside the most discriminating of housewives. But that's the way that people speak. And the point I'm getting at is that we must regularly, just as we have a regime for breakfast, dinner and supper, we must regularly and in as disciplined a way as that, go after, go out for, lay ourselves out for the sincere milk of the word of God.
[25:48] And again, I would say that without regular study of the word of God, and disciplined study of the word of God, we're apt to develop a condition of spiritual anorexia.

Now, I didn't discover about this disease by carefully coming through a medical dictionary. We had three young girls in, I won't say which high school in the north that I was sort of connected with, who through unwise, crushed dieting, probably reading the women's own and didn't consult their doctor, developed a very, very serious physical condition.
Physical anorexia is often brought on through unwise efforts at crushed dieting, and there comes a complete loss of desire to eat.
And those girls, I can think of them now, they just, they became like skeletons, and it took about four years before they began, under proper medical supervision to regain their normal health. And I think that anorexia has a spiritual counterpart.
If we do not discipline ourselves towards regular, informed study of the word of God, and see it as the only way to Christian growth, then we're liable to develop a serious unwillingness to study the Bible, and it will not be in one year that we'll get out of it.
[27:28] And our Christian character will be bound to degenerate in proportion, we'll become like those girls, skeletons fighting for survival. But yet again, Peter says that the Christian must avoid all occasions of spiritual disease, which would interfere, not in this case anything like anorexia, but certain other types of disease, spiritual disease which would interfere with the spiritual growth.

And so we say, lay aside all malice, all guile, hypocrisies, and endings, and all evil speakings. Now probably this comes up in Euroth's exhortation about brotherly love.
And now we find him buttressing and strengthening his argument by showing that even a relatively slight indulgence in the opposite outlook and feeling to brotherly love, and opposite sentiments, must be quite incompatible with Christian growth up to salvation.
He's talking about laying aside all sorts of malice, all sorts of guile, and hypocrisies. I think we may very well take malice as a general word for a hostile attitude, and a kind attitude, and a kind attitude, and a Christian attitude towards others, of which guile, and hypocrisies, and evil speakings, and endings, may take to be particular examples.
Guile suggests deception. It suggests lying in wait. It suggests a person being on the lookout in a hidden way for faults.
[29:09] Doing some sort of unkindness towards others, especially fellow Christians. Hypocrisies?

Well, by the plural. Surely what's referred to are the many disguises of insincerity, pretending to be friendly, but secretly being the opposite.
Now it doesn't mean, certainly doesn't mean that we've got, that we, supposing we don't take kindly to our fellow Christians for whatever reason that we should become gushing. God forbid, it does not mean that. But it means that before God we should be willing to deal very sternly with ourselves, and we find a tendency to pretend to be friendly, but secretly inside.
We're nothing of a kind. Evil speakings? Well, a lot. From railing and slander through to insinuation, the readiness to propagate injurious stories about our neighbours and fellow Christians.

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What did Jesus, in the, what did the prophets say about the Messiah? As smooth, as better were his words while in his heart was war, the Messiah's friend was like that, his would-be friend.
[30:28] Well, the Christian principle lies in, purely in that word from the book of Proverbs. Yet hatred stirreth up strikes, but love covereth all sins.

Something in you and me that's too ready to pick out the sin, and perhaps not shut it from the rooftops, but in some way, in some way, make the sins of others a noticeable thing, and be hiding our own.
Now, Peter's point is that any cherishing of such things cannot but affect for the worse our taste for the rational, guileless milk of the word.
Now instead, maybe sometimes at the communion time, instead of saying, well, of course, the preacher may be pretty hopeless sometimes, instead of saying, well, the preacher was poor, or, well, the Lord wasn't with us, or something like that, but we should be in the wildcups, we should examine ourselves in case we are entertaining, we are allowing the disease of malice, some wrong attitude to somebody in the congregation, some wrong attitude to somebody in our own family, to corrode our spiritual life, and then it becomes impossible spiritually to enjoy the communion.
It's an indispensable condition of Christian growth, that with rigorous and habitual and determined self-denial, all of the affections and lusts of the old man are shud off, like clothes that are fraught with disease.
[32:15] And it's got to be done, in dependence on divine grace. If so be, ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious. Now what Peter means here is, it's not merely that this will result, if this has happened, you know, if you've tasted that the Lord is gracious, this is going to happen willy-nilly.

But that you must, but because you've tasted that the Lord is gracious, you must make sure, by a diligent use of all the means of grace, that this other thing will happen, your growth in character.
Paul talks in Romans chapter 5, I think, about this grace wherein you stand, to Christians, to believers. And in terms of that grace in which the believer stands, however unworthy he may be at any stage, suppose he detects himself in the act of sheer hostility towards some fellow believer, and indulges in some malice or guile or hypocrisy or envying or evil speaking.
Nevertheless, he can come to the Lord and rejoice in the hope of the glory of God as he seeks his forgiveness and his grace to overcome it. Having experienced the Lord Jesus Christ, having tasted it, he's gracious, without any merit of our own, we can go on to perfection.
We can overcome those things that defile character and mar fellowship. The Christian's in a very, very different position. The man who has tasted that the Lord is gracious, who has regenerated through the principle of the word, he's in a very, very different position from the man who's outside, from the unbeliever, from the unregenerate, the man who has not tasted that the Lord is gracious.
[34:03] He's like a farmer, the farmer who already owns a piece of fertile land, and he's got in his possession seed corn, and this farmer is in the privileged position of being able confidently to expect crops if he gets busy with cultivation and gets busy with the sowing of the seed.

So the principle that's reinforced by Peter here really is that of the diligent use of the means of grace, which brings us to our thought earlier of the word sacraments and prayer.
The Lord's help is freely available. And it's on that understanding that we approach the Lord's Supper once again as a means of grace.
And we can look for a blessing as a congregation participating in the Lord's Supper on the very terms that the Apostle Peter is urging. We don't look.
We don't look for a mechanical, automatic benefit from sitting at the Lord's table. What the Romans would call ex opere operato.
[35:14] Just it happens by us almost at the leverage of doing the thing. And we can expect a blessing as a congregation at the Lord's table, not from a vague expectation that somehow once again the Lord will be good to us and bless the communion.

We hope that's true, of course. But what Peter is saying is that we can expect to serve the ends of communion, of fellowship, by deliberate, careful putting away of the attitudes in ourselves towards our fellow Christians, which mar communion.
And not saying, well, I'm a hopeless Christian. Maybe we are considering ourselves, but rather looking to the Lord of grace, the Lord that we have tasted as gracious, to seal our efforts with success.

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Prayerfully relying on his promises made to those who obediently and humbly and reverently take advantage of the ordinances of the Gospel.
And this thought, tasting that the Lord is gracious, says to the believer that as he approaches the Lord's table with contrite heart, he should, as it were, revel in the promises of grace for the utterly unworthy.
[36:38] Paul said, God forbid, the man that had achieved such great things in character and in life and in ministry, God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We should revel in the concept of grace and revel in coming to the grace of God. Do you remember how often Paul said, it's some chapter in Philippians, I'm sure, well, it's two chapters, probably four and two at a death, where I think he says three or four times, and in one context he says it, the one enunciation following immediately on the other, rejoice in the Lord, the Lord of all grace, always. And again I say, rejoice. So we put away all these rotten things, these rotten attitudes to our fellow believers in dependence upon God's grace, knowing that we can come to the table completely cleansed, completely acceptable, and enjoy the promise that we shall, what Peter says here, that we shall grow up to salvation.
May the Lord bless us. May the Lord bless us. Let us pray. Lord, we have never come to any occasion of the observance of the Lord's Supper, not one of us, in the position of being worthy. If we have been counted worthy at all, it's because of the grace wherein we stand, through which we have access to thee, and have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.
[38:18] And we would seek, Lord, to come again on that very same ground of acceptance. We know, Lord, there are many things that are not right in our hearts, many things that contend with the spirit of loving the Lord, and loving our brethren in the Lord.

But Lord, we know that we are called to shed off these things, as a man would put off dirty clothing. And give us grace to do this, to take steps to do it, to cast aside those disease-ridden moods, calling upon me for the grace to be able to cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit.
And we pray thee, Lord, that we may desire the sincere milk of the word, and in a disciplined, careful way, in a diligent way, make use of the means of grace, that we may grow thereby.
And all this we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

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